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History of Science, Philosophy and Culture
in Indian Civilization

General Editor D. P. Chattopadhyaya

Volume VII Part 1

The State and Society
in Medieval India

edited by
J. S. GREWAL

PHISPC

The volumes of the **PROJECT ON THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE, PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURE IN INDIAN CIVILIZATION** aim at discovering the main aspects of India's heritage and present them in an interrelated way. In spite of their unitary look, they recognize the difference between the areas of material civilization and those of ideational culture. The Project is executed by scholars with different ideological persuasions and methodological approaches and is marked by 'methodological pluralism'.

In spite of its primary historical character, this Project, both in its conceptualization and execution, has been shaped by many scholars drawn from different disciplines. It is for the first time that an endeavour of such a unique and comprehensive character has been undertaken to study critically a major world civilization like India.

The present volume fills a serious lacuna in existing historiography with a comprehensive look at the social history of medieval India. Contributors examine a range of issues relating to medieval Indian history within the larger parameters of state and society: state forms and patronage, demographic distribution, societal organization, slavery, social change, gender relations, and urbanization.

The pan-Indian character of the volume is reflected in the way it looks at state forms and social organizations among the Cholas, the Delhi Sultanate, the Sultanate of Bengal, Himachal, Kumaon and Garhwal regions, medieval Rajasthan, the Vijayanagar State, Kerala, the Mughal Empire, Maharashtra, and the Punjab. Written by eminent historians, the essays highlight the importance of the medieval period in Indian history.

This volume, and others in the series, will be of special interest to students and scholars of history, philosophy,

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The State and Society in Medieval India

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History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization

General Editor D.P. Chattopadhyaya

VOLUME VII PART 1

The State and Society in Medieval India

edited by

J.S. GREWAL

Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture

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Preface

Like a score of other editorial fellows of the Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture, I was free to plan this volume on the state and society in medieval India in accordance with my own lights. Informal discussion with Professor Indu Banga in Chandigarh, with Professor Ravinder Kumar and Professor Satish Chandra in Delhi, and with Professor Irfan Habib, Professor Athar Ali, Professor Iqtidar Alam Khan, and Professor Shireen Moosvi in Aligarh proved to be immensely helpful in defining its scope.

A preliminary statement on a possible treatment of the state included structure of power, administrative institutions and their functions, economic policies and their bearing on various classes of people, composition of the ruling class and its politico-administrative role and style of life; patronage extended by the rulers to individuals and institutions, and limitations of the state in relation to the society and in relation to its internal and external adversaries. For the study of society, a distinction was made between the people living under tribal organization in forests, deserts or hills, and the settled society with a more complex political economy and stratified social order. The latter component was seen as divided into rural and urban, underlining the importance of the phenomenon of urbanization. In the treatment of rural and urban society the main focus could be on horizontal stratification and social mobility. Social stability and change could be seen in relation to the state and social institutions.

I am grateful to all the contributors for their papers and to many of them for their help in defining the scope of the volume, devising its themes, and identifying other contributors. One eminent historian who was not supposed to contribute any paper but who did much towards shaping this volume was the late Professor Ravinder Kumar. I find some consolation in acknowledging my debt to him.

I am happy to acknowledge the cooperation of Mr Sreekumaran S., in everything connected with the office of the director of the project. Professor Bhuvan Chandel, as project-coordinator, was extremely helpful in organizing the seminars for this volume as in all other matters. Above all, I am grateful to Professor D.P. Chattopadhyaya who remained readily accessible for sound advice whenever needed. It was a pleasure to work for the project with him as its director.

Ms Kuldeep Kaur Grewal provided assistance formally first as a research assistant for the project and then informally in her personal capacity as a scholar. Among other things, she compiled the bibliography for this volume. I thank her most warmly for her contribution. Professor Indu Banga was associated with the volume from the very beginning. At one stage there was even the idea that she may become joint-editor but it was not given a formal shape. Nevertheless, she remained involved in the pursuit and completion of this volume. It is dedicated to Professor Indu Banga in deep appreciation of her long and active association with this work.

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General Introduction

I

It is understandable that man, shaped by nature, would like to know nature. The human ways of discovering and exploring aspects of nature are evidently diverse, theoretical and practical, scientific and technological, artistic and spiritual. This diversity has, on scrutiny, been found to be neither exhaustive nor exclusive. The complexity of physical nature, the life-world and, particularly, the human mind is so enormous that it is futile to follow a single method for comprehending all the aspects of the world in which we are situated.

One need not feel bewildered by the variety and complexity of worldly phenomena. After all, both from traditional wisdom and our daily experience, we know that our own nature is not alien to the structure of the world. Positively speaking, the elements and forces that are out there in the world are also present in our body-mind complex, enabling us to adjust ourselves to our environment. Natural conditions as well as the social conditions of life have similarities between them. This is not to underrate in any way the differences in various human ways of life all over the world, partly due to the variation in climatic conditions and partly to the distinctness of production-related tradition, history, and culture.

Three broad approaches are discernible in the works on historiography of civilization, comprising science and technology, art and architecture, social sciences and institutions. Firstly, some writers are primarily interested in discovering the general laws which govern all civilizations spread over different continents. They tend to underplay what they call the noisy local events of the external world and peculiarities of different languages, literature, and histories. Their accent is on the unity of nature, science, and mankind. The second group of writers, unlike the generalist or transcendentalist ones, attach primary importance to the distinctiveness of every culture. To these writers human freedom and creativity are extremely important and basic in character. Social institutions and the cultural articulations of human consciousness, they argue, are bound to be expressive of the concerned people's consciousness. By implication they tend to reject concepts like archetypal consciousness, the universal mind, and providential history. There is a third group of writers who offer a composite picture of civilizations, drawing elements both from their local as well as common characteristics. Every culture has its local roots and peculiarities. At the same time, it is pointed out that due to demographic migration and immigration over the centuries, an element of compositeness emerges almost in every culture. When, due to a natural calamity or political exigencies, people move from one part of the world to another, they carry with them, among other things, their language, cultural inheritance, and ways of living.

In the light of the above facts, it is not at all surprising that comparative anthropologists and philologists are intrigued by the striking similarity between different language families and the rites, rituals, and myths of different group of people. Speculative philosophers of history, heavily relying on the findings of epigraphy, ethnography, archaeology, and theology, try to show in very general terms that the particulars and universals of culture are 'essentially' or 'secretly' interrelated. The spiritual aspects of culture like dance and music, beliefs pertaining to life and death, on analysis, are found to be mediated by practicalities such as weather forecasting, food production, urbanization, and the invention of scripts. The transition from a oral culture to written one was made possible by the mastery of symbols and rules of measurement. Speech precedes grammar, poetry, or prosody. This shows how the 'matter' and 'forms' of life are so subtly interwoven.

II

The PHISPC publications on the History of Science, Philosophy, and Culture in Indian Civilization, in spite of their unitary appearance, do recognize the differences between the areas of material civilization and those of ideational culture. It is not the work of a single author. Nor is it executed by a group of thinkers and writers who are methodologically uniform or ideologically identical in their commitments. In conceiving the project we have interacted with, and been influenced by, the writings and views of many Indian and non-Indian thinkers.

The attempted unity of this project lies in its aim and inspiration. We have in India many scholarly works written by Indians on different aspects of our civilization and culture. Right from the pre-Christian era to our own time, India has drawn the attention of various countries of Asia, Europe, and Africa. Some of these writings are objective and informative and many others are based on insufficient information and hearsay, and therefore not quite reliable, despite their value. Quality and view-points keep changing not only because of the adequacy and inadequacy of evidence but also, and perhaps more so, because of the bias and prejudice, religious and political conviction, of writers.

Besides, it is to be remembered that history, like nature, is not an open book to be read alike by all. The past is mainly enclosed and only partially disclosed. History is, therefore, partly objective or 'real' and largely a matter of construction. This is one of the reasons why some historians themselves think that it is a form of literature or art. However, it does not mean that historical construction is 'anarchic' and arbitrary, even though imagination plays an important role in it.

The character of historical construction is basically dependent upon the *questions* which the historian raises and wants to understand or answer in terms of the ideas and actions of human beings in the past ages. In a way, history, somewhat like the natural sciences, is engaged in answering questions and in exploring relationships of cause and effect between events and developments across time. While in the natural sciences, the scientist poses questions about nature in the form of hypotheses, expecting to elicit authoritative answers to such questions, the historian studies the past, partly for the sake of understanding it for its own sake and partly also for the light which the past throws upon the present, and the possibilities which it opens up for moulding the future. But the difference between the two approaches must not be lost sight of. The scientist is primarily interested in discovering laws and framing theories, in terms of which, different events and processes can be connected and anticipated. His interest in the conditions or circumstances attending the con-

cerned events is secondary. Therefore, scientific laws turn out to be basically abstract and easily expressible in terms of mathematical language. In contrast, the historian's main interest centres round the *specific* events, human ideas and actions, not *general* laws. So, the historian, unlike the scientist, is obliged to pay primary attention to the circumstances of the events he wants to study. Consequently, history, like most other humanistic disciplines, is concrete and particularist. This is not to deny the obvious truth that historical events and processes, consisting of human ideas and actions, show some trend or other and weave some pattern or other. If these trends and patterns were not there at all in history, the study of history as a branch of knowledge would not have been profitable or instructive. But one must recognize that historical trends and patterns, unlike scientific laws and theories, are not general or purported to be universal in their scope.

III

The aim of this project is to discover the main aspects of Indian culture and present them in an interrelated way. Since our culture has influenced, and has been influenced by, the neighbouring cultures of West Asia, Central Asia, East Asia, and South-east Asia, attempts have been made here to trace and study these influences in their mutuality. It is well known that during the last three centuries, European presence in India, both political and cultural, has been very widespread. In many volumes of the project considerable attention has been paid to Europe and through Europe to other parts of the world. For the purpose of a comprehensive cultural study of India, the existing political boundaries of the South Asia of today are more of a hindrance than help. Cultures, like languages, often transcend the boundaries of changing political territories.

If inconstant political geography is not a reliable pointer to the understanding of the layered structure and spread of culture, a somewhat comparable problem is encountered in the area of historical periodization. Periodization or segmenting time is a very tricky affair. When exactly one period ends and another begins is not precisely ascertainable. The periods of history designated as ancient, medieval, and modern are purely conventional and merely heuristic in character. The varying scopes of history, local, national, and continental or universal, somewhat like the periods of history, are unavoidably fuzzy and shifting. Amidst all these difficulties, the volume-wise details have been planned and worked out by the editors in consultation with the project director and the general editor. I believe that the editors of different volumes have also profited from the reactions and suggestions of the contributors of individual chapters in planning the volumes.

Another aspect of Indian history which the volume-editors and contributors of the project have carefully dealt with is the distinction and relation between civilization and culture. The material conditions which substantially shaped Indian civilization have been discussed in detail. From agriculture and industry to metallurgy and technology, from physics and chemical practices to the life sciences and different systems of medicines—all the branches of knowledge and skill which directly affect human life—form the heart of this project. Since the periods covered by the PHISPC are extensive—prehistory, proto-history, early history, medieval history, and modern history of India—we do not claim to have gone into all the relevant material conditions of human life. We had to be selective. Therefore, one should not be surprised if one finds that only some material aspects of Indian civilization have received our focused attention, while the rest have been dealt with in principle or only alluded to.

One of the main aims of the project has been to spell out the first principles of the philosophy of different schools, both pro-Vedic and anti-Vedic. The basic ideas of Buddhism, Jainism, and Islam have been given their due importance. The special position accorded to philosophy is to be understood partly in terms of its proclaimed unifying character and partly to be explained in terms of the fact that different philosophical systems represent alternative world-views, cultural perspectives, their conflict, and mutual assimilation.

Most of the volume-editors and at their instance, the concerned contributors, have followed a middle path between the extremes of narrativism and theoreticism. The underlying idea has been this: If in the process of working out a comprehensive project like this, every contributor attempts to narrate all the interesting things that he has in the back of his mind, the enterprise is likely to prove unmanageable. If, on the other hand, particular details are consciously forced into a fixed mould or pre-supposed theoretical structure, the details lose their particularity and interesting character. Therefore, depending on the nature of the problem of discourse, most of the writers have tried to reconcile in their presentation, the specificity of narrativism and the generality of theoretical orientation. This is a conscious editorial decision, and followed because, in the absence of a theory, however inarticulate it may be, the factual details tend to fall apart. Spiritual network or theoretical orientation makes historical details not only meaningful but also interesting and enjoyable.

Another editorial decision which deserves spelling out is the necessity or avoidability of duplication of the same theme in different volumes or even in the same volume. Certainly, this project is not an assortment of several volumes. Nor is any volume intended to be a miscellany. This project has been designed with a definite end in view and has a structure of its own. The character of the structure has admittedly been influenced by the variety of the themes accommodated within it. Again it must be understood that the complexity of structure is rooted in the aimed integrality of the project itself.

IV

Long and in-depth editorial discussion led us to several unanimous conclusions. Firstly, our project was going to be *unique*, unrivalled, and discursive in its attempt to integrate different forms of science, technology, philosophy, and culture. Its comprehensive scope, continuous character, and accent on culture distinguish it from the works of such Indian authors as P.C. Ray, B.N. Seal, Binoy Kumar Sarkar, and S.N. Sen and also from such Euro-American writers as Lynn Thorndike, George Sarton, and Joseph Needham. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to suggest that it is for the first time that an endeavour of so comprehensive a character, in its exploration of the social, philosophical, and cultural characteristics of a distinctive world civilization—that of India—has been attempted in the domain of scholarship.

Secondly, we try to show the linkages between different branches of learning as different modes of experience in an *organic* manner and without resorting to a kind of reductionism, materialistic or spiritualistic. The internal dialectics of organicism without reductionism allows fuzziness, discontinuity, and discreteness within limits.

Thirdly, positively speaking, different modes of human experience—scientific, artistic, etc., have their own individuality, but not necessarily autonomy. Since all these modes are the modification and articulation of *human* experience, they are bound to have some finely

graded commonness. At the same time, it has been recognized that reflection on different areas of experience and investigation brings to light new insights and findings. Growth of knowledge requires humans, in general, and scholars, in particular, to identify the distinctness of different branches of learning.

Fourthly, to follow simultaneously the twin principles of: (a) individuality of human experience as a whole, and (b) individuality of diverse disciplines, is not at all an easy task. Overlap of themes and duplication of the terms of discourse become unavoidable at times. For example, in the context of *Dharmaśāstra*, the writer is bound to discuss the concept of value. The same concept figures in economic discourse and also occurs in a discussion on fine arts. The conscious editorial decision has been that, while duplication should be kept to its minimum, for the sake of intended clarity of the themes under discussion, their reiteration must not be avoided at high intellectual cost.

Fifthly, the scholars working on the project are drawn from widely different disciplines. They have brought to our notice an important fact that has clear relevance to our work. Many of our contemporary disciplines like economics and sociology did not exist, at least not in their present form, two centuries or so ago. For example, before the middle of the nineteenth century, sociology as a distinct branch of knowledge was unknown. The term is said to have been coined first by the French philosopher Auguste Comte in 1838. Obviously, this does not mean that the issues discussed in sociology did not exist. Similarly, Adam Smith's (1723–90) famous work *The Wealth of Nations* is often referred to as the first authoritative statement of the principles of (what we now call) economics. Interestingly enough, the author was equally interested in ethics and jurisprudence. It is clear from history that the nature and scope of different disciplines undergo change, at times very radically, over time. For example, in India 'Arthaśāstra' does not mean the science of economics as understood today. Besides the principles of economics, the *Arthaśāstra* of ancient India discusses at length those of governance, diplomacy, and military science.

Sixthly, this brings us to the next editorial policy followed in the project. We have tried to remain very conscious of what may be called indeterminacy or inexactness of translation. When a word or expression of one language is translated into another, some loss of meaning or exactitude seems to be unavoidable. This is true not only in the bilingual relations like Sanskrit-English and Sanskrit-Arabic, but also in those of Hindi-Tamil and Hindi-Bengali. In recognition of the importance of language-bound and context-relative character of meaning we have solicited from many contributions, written in vernacular languages by learned scholars. In order to minimize the miseffect of semantic inexactitude we have solicited translational help from bilingual scholars who know both English and the concerned vernacular language—Hindi, Tamil, Telegu, Bengali, or Marathi.

Seventhly and finally, perhaps the place of technology as a branch of knowledge in the composite universe of science and art merits some elucidation. Technology has been conceived of in very many ways, for example as autonomous, as 'standing reserve', as liberating or enlargemental, and as an alienative or estrangemental force. The studies undertaken by the project show that, in spite of its much emphasized mechanical and alienative characteristics, technology embodies a very useful mode of knowledge that is peculiar to man. The Greek root words of technology are *techne* (art) and *logos* (science). This is the basic justification of recognizing technology as closely related to both epistemology, the discipline of valid knowledge, and axiology, the discipline of freedom and values. It is in this context that we are reminded of the definition of man as *homo technikos*. In Sanskrit, the word closest to *techne* is *kala* which means any practical art, any mechanical or fine art. In the Indian tradition, in *Śaivatantra*, for example, among the arts (*kala*) are counted

dance, drama, music, architecture, metallurgy, and knowledge of dictionary, encyclopaedia, and prosody. The closeness of the relation between arts and sciences, technology and other forms of knowledge are evident from these examples and was known to people of the ancient world. The human quest for knowledge involves the use of both head and hand. Without mind, the body is a corpse and the disembodied mind is a bare abstraction. Even for our appreciation of what is beautiful and the creation of what is valuable, we are required to exercise both our intellectual competence and physical capacity. In a manner of speaking, one might rightly affirm that our psychosomatic structure is a functional connector between what we are and what we could be, between the physical and the beyond. To suppose that there is a clear-cut distinction between the physical world and the psychosomatic one amounts to denial of the possible emergence of higher logico-mathematical, musical, and other capacities. The very availability of aesthetic experience and creation proves that the supposed distinction is somehow overcome by what may be called the bodily self or embodied mind.

V

The ways of classification of arts and sciences are neither universal nor permanent. In the Indian tradition, in the *R̥gveda*, for example, *vidyās* (or sciences) are said to be four in number: (i) *Trayī*, the triple Veda; (ii) *Ānvīkṣikī*, logic and metaphysics; (iii) *Daṇḍa-nīti*, science of governance; (iv) *Vārtta*, practical arts such as agriculture, commerce, medicine, etc. Manu speaks of a fifth *vidyā*, viz., *Ātma-vidyā*, knowledge of self or of spiritual truth. According to many others, *vidyā* has fourteen divisions, viz., the four Vedas, the six *Vedāṅgas*, the *Purāṇas*, the *Mīmāṃsā*, *Nyāya*, and *Dharma* or law. At times, the four *Upa-vedas* are also recognized by some as *vidyā*. Kalas are said to be thirty-three or even sixty-four.

In the classical tradition of India, the word *śāstra* has at times been used as synonym of *vidyā*. *Vidyā* denotes instruments of teaching, a manual or compendium of rules, a religious or scientific treatise. The word *śāstra* is usually found after the word referring to the subject of the book, for example, *Dharma-śāstra*, *Artha-śāstra*, *Alaṃkara-śāstra*, and *Mokṣa-śāstra*. Two other words which have been frequently used to denote different branches of knowledge are *jñāna* and *viññāna*. While *jñāna* means knowing, knowledge, especially the higher form of it; *viññāna* stands for the act of distinguishing or discerning, understanding, comprehending and recognizing. It means worldly or profane knowledge as distinguished from *jñāna*, knowledge of the divine.

It must be said here that the division of knowledge is partly conventional and partly administrative or practical. It keeps on changing from culture to culture, from age to age. It is difficult to claim that the distinction between *jñāna* and *viññāna* or that between science and art is universal. It is true that even before the advent of modern age, both in the East and the West, two basic aspects of sciences started gaining recognition. One is the *specialized character* of what we call scientific knowledge. The other is the concept of *trained skill* which was brought close to scientific knowledge. In medieval Europe, the expression 'the seven liberal sciences' has often been used simultaneously with 'the seven liberal arts', meaning thereby, the group of studies by the *Trivium* (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and *Quadrivium* (arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy).

It may be observed here, as has already been alluded to earlier, that the division between different branches of knowledge, between theory and practice, was not pushed to an extreme extent in the early ages. *Praxis*, for example, was recognized as the prime *technē*.

The Greek word, *technologia* stood for systematic treatment, for example, of grammar. *Praxis* is not the mere application of *theoria*, unified vision or integral outlook, but it also stands for the active impetus and base of knowledge. In India, one often uses the terms *Prayukti-vidyā* and *Prayodyogika-vidyā* to emphasize the practical or applicative character of knowledge. *Prayoga* or application is both the test and base of knowledge. Doing is the best way of knowing and learning.

That one and the same word may mean different 'things' or concepts in different cultures and thus create confusion has already been stated. Two such words, which in the context of the project deserve special mention, are *dharma* and *itihāsa*. Ordinarily, *dharma* in Sanskrit-rooted languages is taken to be the conceptual equivalent of the English word *religion*. But, while the meaning of religion is primarily theological, that of *dharma* seems to be manifold. Literally, *dharma* stands for that which is established or that which holds people steadfastly together. Its other meanings are law, rule, usage, practice, custom, ordinance, and statute. Spiritual or moral merit, virtue, righteousness and good works are also denoted by it. Further, *dharma* stands for natural qualities like burning (of fire), liquidity (of water), and fragility (of glass). Thus one finds that meanings of *dharma* are of many types—legal, social, moral, religious, or spiritual, and even ontological or physical. All these meanings of *dharma* have received due attention of the writers in the relevant contexts of different volumes.

This project, being primarily historical as it is, has naturally paid serious attention to the different concepts of history—epic-mythic, artistic-narrative, scientific-causal, theoretical, and ideological. Perhaps the point that must be mentioned first about history is that it is not a correct translation of the Sanskrit word *itihāsa*. Etymologically, it means what really happened (*iti-ha-āsa*). But, as we know, in the Indian tradition *purāṇa* (legend, myth, tale, etc.), *gāthā* (ballad), *itivṛtta* (description of past occurrence, event, etc.), *ākhyāyikā* (short narrative), and *vaṃśa-carita* (genealogy) have been consciously accorded a very important place. Things started changing with the passage of time and particularly after the effective presence of Islamic culture in India. Islamic historians, because of their own cultural moorings and the influence of the Semitic and Graeco-Roman cultures on them, were more particular about their facts, figures, and dates than their Indian predecessors. Their aim to bring history close to statecraft, social conditions, and the lives and teachings of the religious leaders imparted a mundane character to this branch of learning. The Europeans whose political appearance on the Indian scene became quite perceptible only towards the end of the eighteenth century, brought in with them their own view of historiography in their cultural baggage. The impact of the Newtonian revolution in the field of history was very faithfully worked out, among others, by David Hume (1711–76) in *History of Great Britain from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688* (6 Vols., 1754–62), and Edward Gibbon (1737–94) in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (6 Vols., 1776–88). Their emphasis on the principles of causality, datability, and continuity/linearity of historical events introduced the spirit of scientific revolution in European historiography. The introduction of English education in India and the exposure of the elites of the country to it largely account for the decline of the traditional concept of *itihāsa* and the rise of the post-Newtonian scientific historiography. Gradually, Indian writers of our own history and cultural heritage started using more European concepts and categories. This is not to suggest that the impact of the European historiography on Indian historians was entirely negative. On the contrary, it imparted an analytical and critical temper which motivated many Indian historians of the nineteenth century to try to discover and represent our heritage in a new way.

Introduction

J.S. Grewal

The political history of medieval India was marked by the establishment of empires. The rise of an empire involves the subversion or subordination of old polities; the decline and fall of an empire, in turn, involves the rise of new ones. Much of the political dynamics of medieval India thus gets related to imperial projects. In certain areas, however, imperial polity had only a marginal effect. They had their own dynamics or statistics of change or continuity. Everywhere, the state as an institution, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, whether imperial or regional, or subregional, had a close bearing on both social change and social stability. The state and society may thus be seen in a dialectical relationship.

This volume contains twenty-eight papers of varying length on a variety of themes related to the state and society, with a wide range of factual information, significant detail, new ideas, and implicit or open debate with other scholars. Thematically, these papers fall into four parts. The first part relates primarily to political structures, the second to social structure, the third to interaction between the state and society in their regional settings, and the fourth part relates to some significant dimensions of the medieval Indian society. Considerations of time and space, added to the thematic, have suggested the sequence of papers in each part.

The purpose of this introduction is to bring the main argument of each paper into bold relief, making use of its language as far as possible, and curbing the temptation to go beyond what its author says. This overview is expected, metaphorically, to bind the volume in a framework helpful for the reader.

I

The first part consists of seven papers. Three of these deal with the largest states of the period: the sultanate of Delhi (1206–1526), the Vijayanagar state (1336–1650), and the Mughal empire (1526–1761). Two papers relate to regional kingdoms: the sultanates of

Gujarat (1407–1572) and Kashmir (1339–1586). The sixth paper deals with state patronage, and the seventh with the state and social change in medieval India.

Professor Habib refers to the immediate background of the sultanate of Delhi before Iltutmish (1210–36) tried to control all those areas in India that had acknowledged the authority of Ghor. He used the support of his own Turkish slaves and immigrant nobles, who were mostly Persian-speaking Taziks. The large territorial units called *iqṭās* were assigned to governors called *walīs* or *muqṭīs* for the collection of tribute and booty. Extensive territories around Delhi were retained directly by the sultan and assigned to individual soldiers of his own army as miniature *iqṭās*. Delhi emerged as a major cultural and economic centre, with a large number of merchants, craftsmen, and slaves. The standard gold, silver, and copper currency introduced by Iltutmish was helpful in promoting trade. After his death in 1236, his Turkish slaves acquired dominance in the sultanate till one of them, Balban, became sultan (1266–87). He adopted the trappings of old Iranian monarchy to bolster his dignity, but the sultanate remained confined to its previous limits. The social base on which it rested was provided by immigrant and Indian Muslims. While the ruling class was mainly Turkish, the army and bureaucracy were heavily non-Turkish in composition. Two segments of non-Muslim Indians supported the sultanate: the Rajput chiefs (*ranakas*) and cavalymen (*rauts*), who had submitted on tributary terms, and the merchants and bankers called ‘Multanis’.

The Khalji ‘revolution’ brought new elements into the ruling class to broaden its base, and the sultanate witnessed a dramatic phase of expansion towards Rajasthan, Gujarat, and the Deccan, reaching its culmination under Muhammad Tughluq (1325–51), whose power extended to the south. The external expansion was matched by an internal deepening of authority. The *ranakas* and *rauts* were depressed to play the new role of collecting revenue as *chaudharīs* and *khots*. The principal beneficiaries of Alauddin Khalji’s economic policies were the nobles and the merchants. There was a spurt of urbanization that made Delhi one of the largest cities of the world and enriched the Multanis. The sultan’s control over the governors became more effective; the power of military commanders was curtailed. The ruling class was transformed by a steady replacement of old elements by the new. The number of Hindus in the service of the state increased under Tughluq. Conflicts between different elements of the ruling class proved to be a serious danger to the sultanate. South India, the Deccan, and Bengal seceded from the sultanate before Tughluq’s death in 1351.

The sultanate was weakened by the policies of Firoz Tughluq (1351–88). Offices and assignments began to be treated as inheritable; soldiers began to be paid through land assignments instead of cash, and there was relaxation in the imposition of taxes. The sultan resorted to religious displays, imposing poll tax (*jizya*) on Brahmans who had earlier been exempt. The sultanate shrank further in his reign and after his death. The Saiyids (1414–51) and the Lodis (1451–1526) failed to put a stop to its disintegration and decay. Sultan Ibrahim, the last Lodi ruler, was defeated by Babur in the battle of Panipat in 1526. A new state was founded: the Mughal empire.

Professor Iqtidar Alam Khan refers to the collapse of the central authority in Delhi due to Timur’s invasion (1398), a situation in which the nobles of the sultanate serving in Gujarat supported Zafar Khan, a Gujarati Muslim, in founding the sultanate of Gujarat as Muzaffar Shah in 1407. The nobles who supported him were mainly Gujarati Muslims and Afghans. Non-Gujaratis gained strength only in the early sixteenth century when Abyssinians, Ottomans, Arabs, and Persians were inducted into the ruling class. Muzaffar Shah (1407–11) and Sultan Ahmad Shah (1412–40) were able to discipline the nobility, which enabled them to suppress the local chiefs too. Mahmud Begarha (1459–1513) created slave-nobles

in a bid to curb the nobles. As regional commanders, the slave-nobles became semi-independent centres of power. This was the state of affairs when Akbar conquered Gujarat in 1572–73.

Resulting from the subordination of nobles and hereditary chiefs to the sultan, consolidation of the sultanate increased its military power, which was facilitated further by the supply of war horses from West Asia through sea and land, and the availability of gunpowder artillery in the early fifteenth century. The sultans encouraged trade and commerce to increase the wealth of the state as well as its military potential. They were able to extend their sphere of influence to southern Rajasthan, Malwa, and the Deccan. The import of foodgrains from areas lying outside the core of the sultanate of Gujarat appears to have been necessitated by the growth of urban population in Gujarat. Persons belonging to local trading communities were occasionally taken into the nobility of the state. Though the sultans could talk of *jihad* against infidels in times of war, their policies in general were tolerant or liberal. They used the resources of the state to raise architectural monuments known for their unique regional style.

For Professor R.L. Hangloo, the founder of the sultanate of Kashmir was Shah Mir, a non-Kashmiri who was associated with the administration of the state by Rinchan, another outsider who had usurped the throne after the Mongol invasion of Kashmir in the time of King Suhadeva (1301–20). During a fresh invasion of Kashmir by the Mongols after Rinchan's death, Shah Mir won the support of the local chiefs and ascended the throne of Kashmir as Sultan Shamsuddin (1339–53). Apart from fiscal concessions to the people, he associated the Chak and Magray families of Kashmiri nobles with his army and government to consolidate his position. His successor, Sultan Shihabuddin (1353–73), patronized Sufi and Saiyid immigrants from Central Asia who established their religious centres in Kashmir. Many more families of Saiyids entered Kashmir during the reign of Sultan Qutbuddin (1373–89). They too received generous grants of revenue-free land. The most famous of them was Saiyid Ali Hamadani who exerted great influence over the sultan to Islamize Kashmir. This was done more effectively by Sultan Sikandar (1389–1413), 'the idol-breaker'. The Saiyids emerged as the new political elite in Kashmir to occupy both religious and secular space. They helped the sultans consolidate their authority in the state and thereby ensured their own monopoly of power. The sultans needed legitimacy and the Saiyids a privileged position.

The non-Saiyid elements in the nobility looked upon the Saiyid ascendancy as a threat to their survival. Sultan Zain ul-Abidin (1420–70) used the support of the non-Saiyid nobility to evolve an elaborate administrative system and a strong standing army. He encouraged craft production as much as learning, extending his patronage to non-Muslims. The Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir balanced the power of the Saiyids to lend stability to the state. However, Zain ul-Abidin could not resolve the basic contradiction between the 'Islamic' and Kashmiri factions and both sides sought outside intervention. Mirza Haidar Dughlat invaded Kashmir in 1540 on behalf of Humayun and established his own rule. On his death, a member of the Shah Mir dynasty was placed on the throne as a puppet. Indeed, five kings ruled over Kashmir in eight years before Ghazi Khan founded the Chak dynasty in 1560. Despite local support, the Chak rulers could not resist the Mughal arms, and Kashmir was annexed to the Mughal empire by Akbar in 1586.

Professor Y. Subbarayalu points out that four dynasties ruled over the Vijayanagar state: Sangama (1336–1485), Saluva (1486–1505), Tuluva (1506–70), and Aravidu (1571–1650). The Sangama rulers consolidated their rule over the Kannada country south of the

Krishna and Tungbhadra rivers and northern parts of the Tamil country. This territory was divided into about thirty-five provinces (*rajyas*) for administrative purposes, each consisting of the existing local-level ethno-social territory like *nadu*, *parru*, *sima*, or *kampana*. The Saluva rulers made no changes in the administrative arrangements, but the Tuluva Krishnadevaraya and his successors introduced the *nayaka* system to ensure centralization in the process of territorial expansion, which virtually transformed a kingdom into an empire. The nayakas, as the king's agents managed the affairs of small units through lower-ranking nayakas. In due course they became more and more independent, but even the most powerful among them continued to send revenues to the king till nearly the end of the state. The Vijayanagar state has been conceptualized as 'segmentary', 'feudal', or 'proto-patrimonial'. However, no single concept appears to be applicable to the state under all four dynasties. Despite prejudice to the contrary, there is no contemporary evidence to suggest that the rulers of Vijayanagar championed the cause of Hindu dharma against the onslaught of Islam. They took pride in referring to themselves as sultans among the Hindu kings and encouraged Muslims to join their armies.

Tenant cultivators and slave labour on a limited scale appear to have been relatively important in agrarian production in the Vijayanagar state. The hierarchy in agrarian relations from the king to the cultivator was mediated by nayakas, sub-nayakas, chief landholders and temples, and ordinary landholders. There were some structural changes in the land revenue system over the three centuries, in keeping with the change from the official bureaucracy of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to the rule of the nayakas in the sixteenth. The village government was in the hands of the headman, accountant, and watchman. There were some remarkable developments in industry, commerce, and urbanization, resulting in the emergence of some non-agrarian communities. There were migrations and demographic shifts. People speaking more than one language came together in several localities.

The four *varnas* as theoretical categories did not adequately describe the social order. There was differentiation among the Brahmans in terms of occupation and status. The lowest class among them was contemptuously referred to as 'eaters'. The nayakas were above the landholders. The political system itself was an important factor in social mobility. Some of the nayakas in the newly conquered areas were erstwhile members of pastoral and tribal communities who entered the system through the army. The Right Hand and Left Hand were now composed of all direct producers, both agricultural and non-agricultural. Despite their solidarity against the higher classes, there was a clear hierarchy among them. There was a good deal of social tension—a revolt of the Right Hand and Left Hand castes was a reflection of the socio-economic confrontation between the direct producers and the landlords. There were conflicts between the Right Hand and the Left Hand themselves, and also within each. The nayakas appear to have arbitrated such conflicts and redressed grievances to be recognized as legitimate rulers.

Professor Irfan Habib points out that the Mughal empire dominated the political history of India during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Babur's use of guns and muskets proved to be effective in his battles with the Lodis and the Rajputs in 1526 and 1527. His son Humayun (1530–40, 1555–56) successfully met the challenge from Bahadur Shah of Gujarat, but lost to Sher Shah Sur. Sher Shah (1540–45) left quite a few legacies for centralized administration and currency. Akbar (1556–1605) improved upon these legacies through the *mansabdari* system, measurement of land for cash assessment, and systematization of central and provincial administration. He broadened the ethnic base of the ruling class and adopted a policy of 'absolute peace' (*sulh-i kul*), marked by a tolerant attitude towards differ-

ent creeds and schools of thought. He abolished the poll tax (*jizya*) on non-Muslims. Akbar's three successors followed his principles of administration with certain modifications and refinement. Only Aurangzeb seriously modified Akbar's religious policy and reimposed *jizya* in 1679 as the culmination of his measures of religious discrimination. Even so, the Marathas accounted for a sizeable number within the Mughal nobility under Aurangzeb. Nevertheless, symptoms of decline were visible in his reign in the form of agrarian disturbances and the difficulties in assigning *jagirs*. The reign of Muhammad Shah (1719–48) saw a gradual loosening of central authority and governors eventually became autonomous, notably in the Deccan, Bengal, and Awadh. Tax farming (*ijara*) sapped the inner vitality of Mughal administration. The potency of firearms, with its superiority over mounted archers, made the Mughal system obsolete as a framework of military organization. The Maratha conquests, Persian and Afghan invasions, and the rise of Rohila and Jat chiefs reduced the Mughal empire to a weak state. When the Marathas and the Afghans fought the battle of Panipat in 1761, the Mughal empire had ceased even to be a buffer.

The decline of the Mughal empire is linked with the nature of the Mughal state. The view that the real unit of political power in the Mughal empire was *zamindari* right, or the view that the empire was built essentially upon a system of mutual accommodation, does not take into account the magnitude of the land tax collected by the Mughals. Nor can the distinction between the 'core' and the 'periphery' be valid in view of the uniformity of taxation and administrative practices in all the provinces of the empire. External factors like the spread of firearms and the economic strength of Europe could have some relevance, but there were some internal contradictions within the political structure of the Mughal empire that worked to undermine it when they could no longer be reconciled. The more general causes working towards the decline were reinforced by these contradictions. The first arose out of the conflicting interests of the *jagirdars* and *zamindars*. With the growth of an agrarian crisis, the latter rose against the state more frequently than before. The second source of disturbance of the existing order was the conflict between the imperial system and the peasantry. In the revolts of the Marathas and the Jats, discontented peasantry supported the *zamindars*. In the Satnami and Sikh revolts, religious ideology provided the cohesive force for the lower classes, including the peasantry. The recent hypothesis of 'corporate groups' or 'portfolio capitalism', assigning a crucial role to Indian merchants in the decline of the Mughal empire, tends to assume that the mere existence of an important class in the empire was the cause of its decline.

Professor Iqtidar Alam Khan makes the general statement that state patronage to a large number of people outside the ruling classes was meant to mobilize moral support for the ruling dispensations among the vocal segments of the society. Both the earlier Indian tradition and the Islamic world outside India were familiar with it. In the Delhi sultanate grants were made to Muslim scholars, *madrassas*, mosques, and *khanqahs*. The final authority in matters of land grants was the sultan. Resumption of grants was considered to be incompatible with the spirit of Islamic piety. Some scholars and divines among the grantees put forth the view that grants carried the right of ownership and inheritance, but the official view generally upheld was that grants gave the right only to collect the revenue from a given piece of land. Since half of the revenue-free land granted was generally uncultivated (*banjar uftada*), the grantee acquired proprietary right over this part.

The system was overhauled in the reign of Akbar (1556–1605). It was delinked from the theoretical underpinning of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Non-Muslims were no longer debarred from receiving proper grants from the *Diwan-i Sadarat*. The grants given to non-Muslims earlier were called *inam* and were perhaps made by the *Diwan-i Wazarat* on secular

premises. This distinction was obliterated by Akbar: whether in favour of Muslim or non-Muslim individuals and institutions, all grants belonged to the same category of *madad-i ma'ash*. Significantly, Akbar extended the system of *madad-i ma'ash* to non-Muslims while he reduced the grants of orthodox Muslim divines. He also introduced the policy of intervention in the management of grants made for the support of religious establishments, starting with the *dargah* of Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti at Ajmer and extending it to the Madan Mohan temple at Brindavan. In 1673 Aurangzeb resumed the grants held by non-Muslims. However, the later Mughals and their Muslim and non-Muslim successors reverted to Akbar's policy of extending state patronage to all their subjects, irrespective of their religious affiliation.

Professor Satish Chandra points out that the concept of Indian society popularized by European scholars as unchanging has been discarded. It has been shown that Turkish centralization and the introduction of new technologies for agrarian and non-agrarian production resulted in significant socio-economic changes, leading to growth of towns and expansion of the commercial and artisanal sectors. The process of social change reached a climax during the seventeenth century and continued well into the eighteenth despite some serious setbacks. Villages were increasingly integrated into a wider network that affected the pattern and structure of village life. The process of social differentiation in eastern Rajasthan, for example, was quite remarkable. Evidence from Mysore and Uttar Pradesh reinforces this impression. Two important institutions, *ijaradari* and *ta'alluqdari*, emerged in the eighteenth century with implications of social change in Awadh, Gujarat, and Bengal. Social mobility in the villages was also aided by the conversion of many *madad-i ma'ash* holdings into *zamindaris*, and the settlement of Afghans on land. Sedentarization of tribal communities in some areas of Sind and Bihar was yet another aspect of change. The elements of vertical and horizontal mobility ensured that local social tensions were contained and did not seriously affect the social structure as a whole.

There is little doubt that the towns acted as magnets to affect social values and culture. The phenomenal growth of the ruling class in Mughal times had a number of social consequences. The Mughals were remarkably successful in evolving a type of a city that was based on national cultural ethos, which became the standard of high culture and social intercourse in various regions. The popular traditions of toleration and coexistence, strengthened by the new religious movements, led to the emergence of a ruling class that on the whole did not support religious fundamentalism in opposition to the liberal policies initiated by Akbar. The cities played a leading role in fostering a liberal ethos based on literary forms and common participation in religious and quasi-religious festivals. Seventeenth-century evidence from western Rajasthan indicates the importance of the merchant community and craftsmen in towns. Abul Fazl's classification of society places merchants and artificers after warriors but before the intellectual and religious classes. Proliferation of castes was an indication of socio-economic change. The middling strata of professionals became more important. The divide between the landed gentry, the nobility, and the business sections began to be eroded in the eighteenth century. On the whole, we get the picture of a highly structured but dynamic society that was capable of responding to political, economic, and cultural challenges in a positive manner, suggestive of a remarkable capacity for growth.

II

The second part of this volume relates to social structure: demography, professional middle classes, merchants, zamindars, peasants, artisans, and labourers.

Professor Shireen Moosvi suggests that the estimated population of India at the end of the sixteenth century, ranged from 90,000,000 to 125 million, is on the conservative side. She argues in favour 145,000,000. It would have been 176,000,000 in 1701 and 210,000,000 in 1801. The high mountains, thick forests, and dry deserts were the most thinly populated areas: the Himalayas, the extensive forest of central India, and the Thar desert. There were forested areas even in the Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, the Deccan plateau, the Western Ghats, and Kerala. The Indus plains were less densely populated than the Ganges plains. The areas of higher concentration of population were those that had a large proportion of land under cultivation. Among the most thickly populated regions of the Mughal empire were western Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat.

The rural population in Mughal India was about 85 per cent of the total. The number of villages in Bengal, Bihar, Awadh, Allahabad, Malwa, Khandesh, Sind, and Kashmir was either equal to or even higher than the number of villages in these regions in 1881. Since the total population of these areas was higher in 1881, it is safe to infer that the size of villages on the average was smaller during Mughal times. The number of towns and cities was quite large, and some of the cities of the Mughal empire had a population ranging from 200,000 to 500,000. Agra, Delhi, and Lahore were among the largest cities of the world. The most urbanized region of the Mughal empire was Gujarat, followed by Agra. Evidence from half a dozen towns of western Rajasthan indicates that a large proportion of urban population was linked with commerce and banking in the 1660s. People migrated from rural to urban areas, and from towns to cities, involving a good deal of spatial mobility. About a tenth of the people in these towns were Muslim. Information on religious composition indicates that the majority of the peasants in Bengal and Sind by the mid-seventeenth century were Muslim. Around Mathura, however, Muslims were in a small minority. There is no contemporary evidence on the sex ratio, but there can hardly be any doubt that men exceeded women in nearly all social strata due, among other things, to female infanticide and discriminatory treatment of women.

Professor Iqtidar Alam Khan shows that a considerable demand existed in the government and society for the services of certain middle-class professionals like clerks, accountants, physicians, and teachers during the seventeenth century. There is evidence to indicate an exceptional prosperity of accountants and other officials connected with revenue administration, or doing other kinds of specialized jobs in the provincial and central establishments. A major part of their income came from large-scale manipulation in revenue collection and from activities like revenue farming, management of rent-yielding properties, usury, speculation, and horticulture. They continued to realize a number of cesses from the peasants in defiance of explicit orders forbidding such exactions. The harsh treatment of revenue officials by the imperial authorities was due to the fact that they indulged in dishonest practices at the cost of the state. They were treated as 'the potential enemies of the ruling classes'.

There was quite a large public demand for the services of physicians in northern India. In places like Lahore, Kalanaur, Hissar, Delhi, Agra, Khairabad, Jaunpur, and Benaras, services of private practitioners were used by petty *mansabdars*, gentlemen-troopers, merchants and traders, the urban intelligentsia in general, and even artisans. The physicians attending upon the king and the nobles were more prosperous and enjoyed greater

prestige, but they represented only a small fraction of the profession. Physicians were employed on a large scale in the lower echelons, looking after the health of troopers or treating the wounded in action. Among the *tabibs* of small towns there was a tendency to seek employment under mansabdars. The hospitals established by the state or the nobles formed another avenue for ordinary physicians. Their position was no different from that of the petty officials. There was a growing mobility between the artisan and merchant groups on the one hand and learned professions like teaching, accountancy, record-keeping, priesthood, and literary writing on the other. There was geographical mobility too among individuals constituting the middle stratum of the society in search of suitable employment.

The middle stratum came to form a distinct segment of medieval Indian society. The major source of income for its members was the remuneration they received for knowledge and skills that had a large market in the empire. Their antagonistic economic relationship with the Mughal ruling class appears to have increased with the passage of time. When the Mughal imperial system declined rapidly in the first half of the eighteenth century, the professional middle class became more prosperous and assertive. The holders of revenue-free grants, who were predominantly orthodox Muslims, were resentful of this class that cut across religious boundaries.

Professor Shireen Moosvi points out that neither trade nor merchants were unimportant in pre-Turkish India. There were various categories of merchants and various castes of traders. There are references to foreign trade in contemporary sources. 'Multani' in Central Asia came to mean a Hindu merchant, and Gujarati merchants conducted overseas trade. A fairly well-developed credit system was in vogue, suggestive of the importance of bankers and moneylenders. The establishment of the Delhi sultanate provided impetus for trade, with better opportunities for merchants and moneylenders. Multani merchants were prosperous and appreciative of the sultans. Some of them were Muslim. There were other Muslim merchants, dealing with various articles of trade, and some of the nobles also participated in commerce. The most conspicuous categories of merchants were *banjaras* and *banyas*. The latter had a number of sub-castes and belonged to different religious communities. There was a good deal of solidarity among them, they had monopoly over money-changing and banking. Hindu and Muslim merchants in Surat collaborated with one another in business and jointly owned cargos and boats.

The Mughal era opened new vistas for Indian merchants and they were found controlling large sectors of trade in the Red Sea, Persia, Central Asia, and South-East Asia. Some of them possessed immense wealth and resources, like Virji Vohra, Hari Vaishya, and Mulla Ghafur. Indian merchants lived in a world in which the constraints of caste and community were greatly modified by the environment of free trade and economic mobility. Caste and community organizations were evolved for successful conduct of business. Muslim and Armenian merchants learnt to make use of their services in their own interest. Despite assertions to the contrary, commercial enterprise was throttled neither by 'caste' nor by 'despotism'. The commercial classes were not the dominant classes in pre-colonial India, but they were certainly important and influential.

Professor Irfan Habib traces the origins of the zamindars to the evolution of the Rajput castes. In the eighth century Sind *rajaputras*, being horsemen of status, rode saddled horses which the Jatts were not allowed to ride. In the twelfth century Kashmir *rajaputras* were notable warriors, claiming descent from thirty-six families. While the *rajaputras* coalesced into a warrior caste in northern India and the Deccan, they acquired a key position in the structure of power, intruding into agrarian relationships by taking over villages against the

obligation of performing military services. In the Persian texts they appear in the Prakrit form of *rauts*. The *ranakas* and *thakkuras* were superior to them in status. With the establishment of the sultanate, the dynastic Rajput rulers disappeared, but the *ranakas* (tributary chiefs) and *rauts* remained in place. Before long, they were pressed into the position of intermediaries and made responsible for tax collection as *chaudharis* and *khots*. From a military aristocracy they were transformed into a landed gentry. However, all *chaudharis* and *khots* were not necessarily *ranakas* and *rauts*. In the reign of Firoz Tughluq they were bracketed with Muslim *maliks* and *mafrozis* who held superior rights in land as *zamindars*. The *Ain-i Akbari* gives the names of castes, clans, and communities to which the *zamindars* of each *pargana* or *sarkar* belonged. The *khots* in the Doab, the holders of *satarahi* or *biswi* in Awadh and of *vanth* in Gujarat, the *bhumiyas* in Rajasthan and Sind, and the *desais* in the Deccan and Gujarat came to be designated as *zamindars* 'as if the Mughal administration was trying to press different kinds of right-holders, from chiefs to village headmen, into a single mould'.

The *zamindars* held their rights not as a grant from the state, but through inheritance or purchase. Their right consisted of a claim on the actual cultivator side by side with the land tax and cesses levied by the state. The *zamindars* maintained armed retainers to impose their demands on the peasantry. Their total military strength in the empire came to 384,558 cavalry and 4,277,057 infantry, besides 1,863 elephants, 4,260 cannon pieces, and 4,500 boats. The *zamindars* could use their armed strength for extending their *zamindari* possessions. A process of 'Rajputization' followed. Like the Marathas and the Jats, several Muslim *zamindars* claimed Rajput origins: the *Ranghars*, the *Qayam-Khanis*, and the *Mewatis*, for example. In the court literature of the Mughal empire, the term *zamindar* (*bumi*, *rais*, or *taalluqdar*) carried almost a pejorative meaning, reflecting the suspicion of the Mughal ruling class that the *zamindars*, being disloyal, always posed a challenge to the ruling class.

Professor Irfan Habib defines peasant as a person who organizes the cultivation of land with the whole or part of the labour contributed by himself (with his family). He was distinct from the agricultural labourer. A peasant could own the land he cultivated or be a mere tenant. Peasantry had begun to form a large proportion in the population of India with the coming of agriculture. The ruling classes, their dependents, and the towns generally subsisted on the surplus produced by the peasants. During the first millennium after Christ, peasants came to be regarded as *Shudras* rather than *Vaishyas*. While certain older peasant communities were reduced in status, it is possible that communities held earlier to be outside the pale of the *varna* system were absorbed as *Shudras* through pastoralism once they took to agriculture. The Jats, for example, rose from outcastes into low *Shudras* and then into the lowest caste of *Vaishyas* through pastoralism and agriculture from the seventh to the seventeenth century. Once forest folk and pastoral communities took to agriculture, economic differentiation was bound to arise, which in time tended to be socially institutionalized.

The Muslim rulers did not disturb the caste system because, by depressing the sustenance of landless labourers and low-caste peasants, it served as a source of larger surplus. There is hardly any evidence that the sultans encouraged peasant conversions to Islam by any fiscal means. In Firoz Shah's time, *jizya* appeared as an additional impost on non-Muslim peasants, but the practice disappeared soon thereafter. There seems to have been no relaxation of tax on lands inhabited by Muslim peasantry. The status of the Muslim peasant was equivalent to that of a non-Muslim. The social structure within the village continued without much change. It was generally assumed that the peasants had no right to leave their villages. In this respect too there was little change from the practice of late ancient India.

The Mughal government continued to claim that it was entitled to keep the peasants tied to the land. Early in the eighteenth century the zamindars are said to have claimed the right to evict peasants from their land, which the peasants did not contest. But so long as the land-man ratio was favourable, the zamindar's claim to evict had little practical significance. Peasants belonged to several castes. In western Rajasthan, in the 1660s, peasants were listed as Rajputs in numerous villages, but the true peasant caste was that of the Jats who, unlike the Rajputs, worked the plough; their women worked in the fields, and they practised widow remarriage. A number of other groups had similar customs, like Ahirs, Ghosis, and Gujars, in an apparently descending order of status. Another set of peasant castes was composed of Malis and Kachhis who were known for their skill in intensive cultivation. A caste often formed the bulk of peasant population of individual villages, but there were also villages with two or more peasant castes. This kind of complex pattern was present in southern India too. Another complexity was that of religious affiliation, as in villages around Brindavan. There, caste affinities were not forgotten and Muslims were not shunned by fellow peasants. The slow penetration of Islam among the peasantry outside the Indus basin and Bengal had probably little effect on the rural caste structure. The separation of Muslim converts from their original castes was not an abrupt, sudden split, but a long drawn out process. The Mughal administration made no particular distinction between Hindu and Muslim peasants that could attract conversion, except when Aurangzeb imposed the *jizya* in 1679.

Islamic religious literature was rarely addressed to the peasants, if at all. However, Kabir and Guru Nanak (and his successors) evinced interest in the peasantry. The Satnamis of Narnaul, who are regarded as an offshoot of Kabir Panthis, had an unmistakable peasant constituency. The Sikh *panth* had even a stronger constituency of Jat peasantry. Many peasants joined these panths possibly to break out of the lower social status assigned to them in the traditional order. The rejection of traditional constraints inspired militancy and fuelled armed conflict with the Mughal government. While the Satnami revolt failed, the Sikh revolt succeeded in the long run.

Professor Irfan Habib points out that *jati* occupations in the *Manusmriti* exclude agriculture and pastoralism, and also crafts based on materials obtained from agriculture, such as cotton-spinning, weaving, dyeing, and oil manufacture. Crafts like the potter's and the goldsmith's are also excluded. *Jati* occupations are based on gathering or foraging activities, semi-servile services, and nomadic activities. Subjugated with the expansion of agriculture, the gathering and foraging populations were kept outside the varna order to be treated as outcaste *jatis*. Alberuni classifies castes placed outside the four varnas into two groups: the *antyaja* and the outcastes. The former comprised eight 'guilds'. They lived near but outside the villages and towns of the four castes. The outcastes, called Hadi, Doma, Chandala, and Badhatau, were occupied with 'dirty work'. The craftsmen were placed between Shudras and outcastes. Some other texts show that artisans and craftsmen were settled in different quarters of the capital cities while the menial castes lived outside towns and villages inhabited by the four varnas.

The Arab conquerors of Sind had no intention of overthrowing the local social structure. Islamic jurisprudence recognized inequalities and the principle of hierarchy. However, there was no disapproval of horizontal mobility. Any one could adopt an artisanal profession. Endogamy was not prescribed for the professions. Therefore, Muslim artisans could not form part of the caste system in its classic form. Thirteenth-century Delhi had 'artisans from every country and of every kind'. Increasingly large numbers of slaves added to the population of Muslim artisans. The town artisans formed a religiously mixed class.

Some of the great teachers of the monotheistic movements, who belonged to the artisanal class, addressed both Hindus and Muslims. During the Satnami and Sikh revolts, the lowly artisans took their place alongside the peasant rebels.

A particular mark of lowly status of the rural labouring castes was their obligation to render *begar* (forced and usually unpaid labour) to village headmen, zamindars, and officials. Menial castes like Balahars, Thoris, Dhanuks, and Chamars were obliged to act as porters and guides whenever called upon to do so. Begar appears to have been a rural imposition. Manual and artisanal labour was kept attached to the countryside by caste and custom. Some return was assured to them by certain petty shares in the harvest. Certain land allotments were made to members of particular castes to secure their obligation to render certain services. In the towns, market conditions generally prevailed and labourers could work on money wages; artisans could sell their wares directly in the market or work for particular merchants against advances; and some of them worked on wages in workshops (*karkhanas*). Menial-caste and women labourers were cheaper. Women worked not only at transporting bricks and breaking stones, but also in crafts like dyeing and calico-printing. Hereditary skills made it possible to have artisanal products of great quality produced with the rudest of instruments and the minimum of capital investment. The caste system reduced costs and wages for the employers of artisans.

Occupational fixity carried the implication of mismatch between supply and demand. The caste system served as a brake on economic development, but there were some elements of flexibility to moderate its rigours. In the case of increased demand for a new craft, Muslims could respond more easily. The Mughal administration was apparently neutral in respect of caste monopolies of occupations. There were possibilities of adjustment also within the caste system. Tailors, for example, could take up the profession of dyers. However, the fundamentals did not change. The social world of the village labourer and the town artisan does not appear to have changed appreciably from the time of Alberuni to the reign of Aurangzeb.

III

In the third part of the volume the state and society are taken up together in regional settings: Kerala, the Chola region, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Bengal, the north-east, Kumaon and Garhwal, Himachal, and the Punjab.

Dr Kesavan Veluthat takes up the period from the ninth to the eighteenth century for the study of state and society in Kerala. By the end of the eighth century, vast areas of land had been brought under cultivation and social stratification had emerged due to unequal distribution of surplus. Brahmanical organizations had immense influence on economy and society and social stratification was sanctified by their religious scriptures, giving them a privileged position. The Cera king at Mahodayapuram, the 'great one' (*perumal*) of Kerala and its 'king of kings', had a council of Brahman advisers. He enjoyed vague hegemony over a congeries of 'feudatory' chiefs. There was no central bureaucracy or a military arm; the real power in the state was exercised by the local chiefs. The Brahman villages functioned as important nodes of political power. The village assembly (*sabha* or *ur*) consisted of a handful of Brahman landowners who functioned as a corporate group. They invoked the *dharmashastras* for ostracizing or banishing defaulters to consolidate their own dominance over the population as a superimposed minority. Non-Brahman magnates also emerged with the expansion of agriculture and bonded labour, both male and female.

attached to land. A body called *nagaram* controlled urban enclaves, and enjoyed considerable privileges in administrative, fiscal, and judicial matters. Christian, Jewish, and later on Muslim traders of West Asian origin were members of these bodies. The port towns served as the gateways for the entry of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam into Kerala.

The most visible section of population in the available records consists of the middle rungs of the social hierarchy, including the tenants of the vast temple lands. A considerable number of people were employed in various kinds of service for the temple, like musical services, garland-making, and cleaning. Then there were artisans like smiths, carpenters, and washermen, who were lower on the scale. Nearly every section of the society stood in a subordinate relationship to the temple in one way or the other. The religion of the temple with its ideology of *bhakti* was visible in the most striking way.

Due to further expansion of plough agriculture in the wetlands, far-reaching changes were taking place in the polity, economy, and society of Kerala. More centres emerged as nodes of political power, making the superordinate authority of the perumal rather irrelevant by the early twelfth century. The old and new feudatories established themselves as rulers of their territories. The rulers of Venad in the south and of Kolattunad in the north were more powerful among them. The lesser ones too claimed donation from the last perumal as the sanction behind their authority. The area around Mahodayapuram was still under a weak ruler, perhaps of the family of perumals. A third power soon arose in their place: the kingdom of Kozhikode or Calicut. The institution of *svarupam*, used in the general sense of a ruling house, got defined now. In the family of the Zamorins of Calicut, for example, positions up to the sixth prince were clearly recognized with rights and duties. This did not obviate disputes between the competing branches of the chief houses. Several professional classes of fighters and mercenaries came up during the post-Cera period. Individual Brahman *gramas* emerged as more consequential in local affairs. The unit called *kalakam* among the non-Brahman groups was dominated by a particular caste, with jurisdiction over a defined geographical territory. Trade and artisanal activity also expanded.

Trade brought Europeans to Calicut. When the Portuguese ceased to play the game according to its rules, Calicut ceased to offer hospitality. The Portuguese then turned to Cochin. New fruits and vegetables were introduced, like cashew, pineapple, breadfruit, papaya, chilli, and potato. More significantly, the fortunes of the old Christian community were adversely affected. All its members were forced to submit to the Roman Catholic Church, and to reject all that they had held dear for centuries. Kerala lost communal harmony. The dealings of the Dutch with the kingdoms of Kerala did not alter the political structure. The French and the English were even less influential. Only in the eighteenth century did the kingdom of Venad emerge as the monarchy of Travancore, one of the most powerful kingdoms in south India. Elsewhere, landed magnates wielded great power and authority and *sanketams* around temples developed into virtually independent units. On the eve of the eighteenth century, the entire region was more or less settled, with graded rights in land. The hierarchy in relations of production was reflected in the form of jatis. There was no superordinate political authority for the whole of Kerala. A large number of chiefs of varying degree of power and authority held territories of various sizes. The Brahman high priest was the common feature of society even for its lowest sections. Kerala was a 'madhouse' in terms of caste differentiation.

Professor Y. Subbarayalu points out that the Chola state, during the four centuries of its existence (c. 850–1279), was ruled over by twenty kings, with a few co-rulers and a few minor breaks in the line. The most fertile part of its territory was confined to the Kaveri delta, called Chola-nadu, and the state had sovereign rights over Tondai-mandalam, the

northern part of Tamil Nadu. During the ninth and tenth centuries a number of chiefs maintained some sort of subordinate relationship with the Chola monarch. They were masters of their respective territories, but acknowledged the king's overlordship in their orders and sent their armies to assist him in the battle-field.

The coronation ceremony (*abhisheka*) of Chola kings was celebrated by Bramanical rituals. The king adopted grandiose titles like the 'lord of the world' and 'emperor of the three worlds'. His order was called the 'sacred command'; its disobedience was a sacrilege deserving of severe punishment. The image of the king was systematically enhanced through panegyrics put on temple walls and eulogies on copper plates. Succession to the throne was by primogeniture. Matrimonial alliances were made with an eye on consolidation of power. All Chola kings were polygamous. The early kings kept concubines without any inhibition. Some of the early queens came from humble families, and some were originally *devadasis*.

The Chola kings raised in due course a huge standing army, consisting of infantry, calvalry, and elephantry. Endemic warfare implied constant attention to army units, their recruitment and weaponry. With the expansion of the Chola state in the eleventh century, some structural changes took place in its territory. Rajaraja I (985–1014) reorganized the territory to incorporate chiefly territories within the state. New names were given to these territories with the suffix *valanadu*, and *mandalams* were created to incorporate valanadus. The unit called *nadu* was a distinct agricultural micro-region. It was basically a cluster of peasant settlements with a common source of irrigation, like a channel or a tank. Some of the nadus were of high antiquity. While a nadu lay on both the banks of water courses, a valanadu lay only on one bank. Consequently, many a nadu in the channel-rich delta area was partitioned among two different valanadus.

The basic unit called *ur* was a habitation site surrounded by agricultural land. In many villages of this 'agricultural kind', the labourers and artisans had separate quarters. The villages granted to Brahmans (*brahmadeya*) were given new names with reference to the donor, usually the king or the queen. They generally became independent of the nadu. The Brahman villages that attained a fully independent status were called *taniyurs*. Hamlets attached to Brahman villages accommodated tenant cultivators. The Chola rulers elaborated the system of brahmadeyas. The temple village, called *devadana*, enjoyed several privileges like the brahmadeya. Separate lands were provided for the maintenance of irrigation works. The irrigation system of the Kaveri delta became stabilized by the tenth century. The major source of income for the state was land tax (*kadmai*). The assessment was made after a systematic survey. The comprehensive term for tax in the second half of the period was *kudimai* and was meant mainly for maintaining irrigation works. The burden on cultivators became heavy with the passage of time, leading to confrontation between the cultivators and the landlords. The non-agricultural taxes (*ayam* and *pattam*) were levied in the areas of the chiefs outside the mandalams.

Caste consciousness became pronounced in the second half of the Chola period. The Brahmans occupied the first rank in the hierarchy of castes, followed closely by the agriculturist Vellala who were more numerous. Both the Brahman and non-Brahman villages had tenant-cultivators ethnically closer to the Vellala but lower in rank. The merchants were almost equal to the Vellala in rank, but much less numerous. The herding and artisan castes were considered the serving groups, with the former having an edge over the latter. The lowest place was assigned to hunters and leather-workers. The caste of agricultural labour, called *paraiya*, was quite widespread in the plains and its members were considered as slaves (*adimai*) attached to the landholders and cultivators. At the village level the *urar*,

the sabha, and the *nagarattar* were the primary corporate bodies of landholders: the first was a body of the Vellala, the second of the Brahmans, and the third of merchants-cum-landholders in commercial villages and towns. A large number of other people in the villages were excluded from these bodies. The elite of the society, like those of the state, were distinguished by appropriate titles. The higher the status of a person, the longer was his name, composed of segments denoting territorial association, family or *gotra*, father's name, his own given name, and a conferred or an assumed title. Some of the titles were based on caste or a dignified position.

In Brahman villages individual ownership was encouraged from the beginning. In Vellala villages communal ownership continued till the tenth century. Its breakdown in the eleventh century resulted in a complex tenurial system. Hereditary ownership of property, known as *kani*, indicated a privileged position. Some of the *kani* holders (*kaniyalar*) were big landlords, owning even whole villages. They were prominent even in Brahman villages. Temples accumulated large chunks of land by the twelfth century, with their deities as *kani* holders. Their *kani* could be manipulated to become the *kani* of the 'big' people of the locality with the tacit approval of the king, who assigned a part of the superior right in these *kanis* to army people and other retainers. Repeated royal interference in conflicts between the holders of superior rights, *kani* holders, and ordinary cultivators is suggestive of a deepening agrarian crisis.

In the second half of the Chola period supra-local integration was gaining momentum in the society. The predominant position of the *nattar* in the local administration was undermined by three factors: rise of bureaucratic administration, creation of valanadus, and increase in the *brahmadeyas* and temple villages. Outside the core area of Thanjavur, a supra-local assembly covered more than one nadu and consisted of multi-ethnic groups bound by the common profession of agriculture. Supra-local bodies of merchants drawn from different towns spread over the major part of south India in the twelfth century. On many occasions these bodies of landholders and merchants met for some common purpose. Early in the thirteenth century there were signs of solidarity among the tenant-cultivators too. Their joint gatherings protested against heavy taxes and compulsory labour.

The Chola state has been variously characterized as 'highly centralized', 'feudal', 'segmentary', or 'the early state'. None of these strictly applies to the state in its entire career, which falls into three phases: pre-imperial (850–985), imperial (986–1100), and post-imperial (1100–1250). During the first phase, it was a small kingdom. Wars were waged to get tribute from vanquished rulers. Local bodies and communities enjoyed their traditional power. The second phase was marked by a powerful monarchy, growth of private property, and a well-stratified society. The king had a standing army and was assisted by an organized body of officials who were not tied to their localities. Through an elaborate bureaucracy and territorial reorganization a certain degree of centralization of political power was ensured. Government control was extended to *brahmadeyas* and temples, and probably to irrigation works. The post-imperial phase was marked by a complex agrarian system in which the high status and dominance of the Vellala–Brahman ruling class diminished appreciably. There was a fair degree of feudalization of land relations now. Fragmentation of political authority due to the emergence of various local chiefs and the multiplicity of tax collecting agencies imposed enormous burden on the cultivators. An agrarian crisis resulted from an open confrontation between the big landholders and the cultivators. The ultimate demise of the Chola state can be attributed mainly to this crisis.

Professor A.R. Kulkarni looks upon the past traditions of rule in Maharashtra under the Satvahanas and the Yadavs as relevant for the rise of a new state in Maharashtra under

Shivaji. Even more relevant for its rise was the policy of the Muslim rulers to employ indigenous people in important positions in civil and military administration. Their armies were dominated by Hindu cavalry and infantry, and some of the old noble families of Maharashtra acquired discipline in arms under the sultans. The decision of Nizam Shah (1600–1610) to create a third party in Ahmadnagar to counter the power of both the indigenous and foreign Muslim nobles brought Maloji Bhonsle into power and prominence. After Maloji's death his son Shahji became the leader of the Maratha party; his growing importance in Ahmadnagar and Golkonda became the foundation of Maratha power under his son Shivaji.

Shivaji's political career began with occupation of forts lying within the Pune jagir inherited from Shahji. In 1674 he got himself coronated, issued his own gold coin, started a new era, and became the Chhatrapati of the Marathas. He defended the new state against the Mughals till his death in 1680. His sons Sambhaji (1680–89) and Rajaram (1687–1707), and the dowager queen Tarabai saved the state from becoming a part of the Mughal empire. The administrative system evolved by Shivaji proved to be a great asset.

Shivaji created a council of eight ministers, with specific duties assigned to each for the civil and military administration of the state. The three primary divisions of his territory broadly corresponded to the three natural regions of Maharashtra. Each province was divided into districts, called *subhas*, and each district into parganas. The smallest unit was the village, and a number of villages formed a *tappa*. Officials were appointed at all levels for the collection of revenue and maintenance of law and order. Measurement and classification of land served as the basis of assessment, with cash rates for lands producing sugarcane, ginger, turmeric, and vegetables. Local markets were set up and traders were encouraged to settle in the state. Many sources other than land revenue were exploited. Special attention was paid to the maintenance of forts. Apart from infantry and cavalry, Shivaji raised a navy of modest strength. All the three branches of the army were well organized.

In terms of castes, the society in Maharashtra was divided into Brahmans, Marathas, Shudras, and untouchables. In addition to the various Hindu sects in Maharashtra, there were Adivasis, Muslims, and Christians. In Shivaji's time the Brahmans, especially *deshastha* and *chitpavan*, dominated the social and religious life of the people. Many of the Brahmans took to trade, banking, and soldiery. From the village to the state level they dominated the secretarial part of the administration. With the exception of the *senapati*, all Shivaji's ministers were Brahmans. The Marathas were divided into two sections: those who claimed Rajput ancestry, held high political and social status, and formed a closed aristocracy as hereditary chiefs, and those who were agriculturists known as *kunbis* who also served as soldiers under the former. Shivaji used the support of both these sections for establishing his *swaraj*. The Marathas in general, therefore, held high positions, like the *patils* and *deshmukhs*. Next to the Marathas were traders who were generally Gujarati banyas, and there were shopkeepers (*vanis*) in villages. The artisans were organized in separate castes, each with a council of elders called *jatisabha*. The untouchables performed menial jobs. Despite the social and cultural dominance of the Brahmans, caste distinctions were not sharp and strict in Maharashtra. The Varkari saints softened the rigours of caste though they did not overthrow the caste system.

The village community remained the main administrative unit in Maharashtra under Shivaji and his successors. It was organized on the principle of hereditary rights in land. Its residents were classified as *watandars*, *mirasdars*, *balutedars*, and *alutedars*. The watandars held revenue-free land for service and their position was hereditary. The patil and the *kulkarni* in the village, like the *deshmukh* and the *deshpande* in the pargana, were the offi-

cial watandars. The mirasdars were the hereditary proprietors of land in the village. The balutedars included the artisans and the performers of religious and menial services. In addition to the regular balutedars there were coppersmiths, dyers, oilmen, metal-workers, shepherds, betel-leaf dealers, and weavers in the villages. They were called alutedars and got cash payment for their services. The village community settled disputes through arbitration by the patil with the help of the village elders.

Shivaji has been seen a 'robber chief' and also as the 'most constructive genius of medieval times'. His state has been characterized as 'a war state', as a replica of the *watan*, or as a state bearing the imprint of its zamindari origins in terms of its fiscal and political practices. No distinction has generally been made between the state of Shivaji and the Maratha state of the eighteenth century. The character of the Maratha state had begun to change actually under Sambhaji and Rajaram. The council of ministers was functioning no longer, the system of jagirs was introduced, and Maratha *sardars* were inducted to recover lost territories. In the early eighteenth century there were two ruling houses in Maharashtra, with Shahu at Satara and Sambhaji at Kolhapur. Shahu appointed Balaji Vishwanath Bhat as his *peshwa* in 1713. He acquired three *sanads* from the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah: *swaraj*, *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi*, and *babati*. Through these instruments Maratha supremacy was established as a kind of 'dominion status' within the Mughal empire, compromising the sovereignty established by Shivaji. The Maratha *sardars* associated with the political process were authorized to collect *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* from the Mughal areas and they appropriated a major portion of these collections. The king became dependent on his feudatories. The jagir system became hereditary. Peshwa Bajirao I (1720–40) began to exercise almost royal authority on behalf of the nominal Chattrapati. Expansion continued under Peshwa Nanasahab (1740–61) who became de facto ruler of the Maratha state with his headquarters at Pune. The Maratha defeat in the battle of Panipat in 1761 was followed by his death. His successors recovered the lost prestige and power, but mainly through the Maratha *sardars* who became increasingly independent of the peshwa's control. The feudalization of polity weakened the peshwa. The Bhonsles of Nagpur, the Shindes of Gwalior, the Holkars of Indore, and the Gaikwads of Baroda established virtually independent states. This status was reflected in their survival under British paramountcy.

Professor Dilbagh Singh has studied the state with reference to Marwar and the 'state and society' with reference to eastern Rajasthan. The emergence of a number of powerful Rajput clans in different territorial segments of Rajasthan has overshadowed the Bhil, Meena, and Med chiefs remembered as *thakurs*, *chaurasias*, and *bhomias*. Subjugation of tribal chiefs was an essential stage in the emergence of Rajput polity. The shifting political boundaries made it more complicated. The political space was created in a variety of ways and authority was organized on the basis of clan lineages within the framework of a monarchical form of government. Furthermore, the Mughal concept of *watan* was superimposed on the clan-dominated Rajput monarchies during the sixteenth century. Contemporary documents reveal that a clan-dominated *des* was generally perceived as constituting the core (*rajthan*), the *thakurai* of the clan lineage, and the *bhom*, *guda*, or *basi* of the lesser members of the clan. The distinction between *rajthan* and *thakurai* obviated the possibility of treating the clan territory as a compact unit. For all practical purposes, a clan *des* was an amalgamation of a number of miniature *desas*. The clan-ruled *des* itself could shift from one place to another with large-scale expansion.

The founder of the Rathor kingdom of Marwar, Rao Asthan, had obtained fifty to sixty villages and begun to rule over Pali before he conquered villages in Khed. The core

area was shifted from Pali to Khed. When further conquests and colonization took place under his successors, rajthan was shifted to other territories and ultimately to Jodhpur founded by Rai Jodha. A distinction was made between inherited territory (*bapoti*) and newly conquered or colonized territory. During Sher Shah's attack on Marwar in the time of Rao Maldeo, the clan lineage clearly expressed their right of access to ancestral territory: 'We owe our right to a share in the kingdom to the same person who had granted Jodhpur to the Raja'. The holders of charitable grants too were not prepared to accept Maldeo's authority in respect of grants received from earlier rulers. When his son and successor Mota Raja Udai Singh asserted his right to renew the grants of Charans received from other rulers, they launched a protest that ended in their mass suicide.

The Mughal concept of *watan jagir* was applicable primarily to a Rajput chieftain inducted into the Mughal imperial service as a mansabdar. His jagir consisted partly of the clan-dominated territory, including the rajthan. This was regarded as his watan jagir. The thakurai, basi, bhom, and guda units in this jagir came under his control on the authority of an outside power. The territorial rights and authority of the clan lineage were reduced to zamindari rights. The Mughals never treated the Rajput state as a compact territorial unit. Any number of parganas within the clan des, barring only the rajthan, could be given in jagir to outsiders. But the Rajputs themselves never gave up the notion of what they regarded as their own des or clan territory. The concept of the Rajput state as a compact territorial unit with fixed boundaries, encompassing the entire clan-dominated area, crystallized in the late eighteenth century when the Mughal power was clearly declining.

All castes and communities in Rajasthan had their own panchayats to regulate and monitor the social conduct of persons belonging to a particular caste or community. Their jurisdiction extended to matters related to marriage, adoption, and inheritance. They also functioned as bodies resolving intra-caste disputes. Intervention of the state was sought when they failed to resolve the issue to the satisfaction of the contending parties. All customary laws, practices, rituals, rules, and regulations were respected and backed by the state in order to preserve harmony in each basic unit. The state intervened in a wide range of matters, taking a serious view of ill-treatment of the wife by the husband and other members of the family, and upholding the notion of honour and self-respect without any bias in favour of gender, caste, or community. Action was taken against those who outraged the modesty of a woman or showed disrespect to an elder. Marriage contract once formed was not allowed to be broken without the permission of the caste panchayat and the state. On the whole, the state showed great consideration for the injunctions of the dharmashastras.

Inter-caste marriages and liaisons were regarded as illegal and were broken up by the state. Marriage with a person of unknown caste was not approved. Interaction with the person of a wrong caste was regarded as contaminating. The state also dealt with various issues involving religious matters, professional and personal ethics, and violation of customary practices. All matters concerning the violation of social conduct were to be reported by the panchayats to the various state authorities. In some cases, the *panchas* were declared defaulters for having exceeded their authority. The state did not hesitate to use its administrative apparatus to regulate affairs of the village, its distinct social groups, and even its individuals. The primary concern of the state was to preserve the social order in the interest of the king's authority.

For the state and society in Bengal, Professor Aniruddha Ray takes notice of the sultanate of Bengal as an independent entity from 1338 to 1538. The earlier background of Muslim rule was relevant in some ways for its polity, and the sultanate left legacies for the later period. The founder of the sultanate, Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah, concluded a treaty with Firoz

Tughluq by which the Kosi river in Bihar became the boundary between the sultanates of Delhi and Bengal. Nevertheless, his son Sikandar Shah (1358–90) had to defend Bengal against Delhi. After the death of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah (1390–1410), Raja Ganesha of Dinajpur (Rajshahi) became the king-maker first and then the ruler at Pandua in 1415, but he was repudiated by the *ulama* and the Sufis. Probably as a compromise, his son was converted to Islam and proclaimed king with the title of Jalaluddin. He died in 1431 to be succeeded by his son Shamsuddin Ahmad Shah. In 1437, however, the Ilyas Shahi dynasty was restored. Ruknuddin Mubarak Shah (1459–74) organized a militia of Ethiopian slaves and recruited Arab soldiers as his palace guards. The Ilyas Shahi ruler was overthrown by the commander of the Ethiopians in 1487 and he in turn was dislodged by the Arab Alauddin Husain Shah in 1494. The Husain Shahi dynasty ruled over Bengal till 1538 when Sher Shah Sur took over Bengal. Thus, several dynasties ruled over Bengal in two hundred years. Only two of these were really important: the Ilyas Shahi and the Husain Shahi.

In the time of Ilyas Shah the *ulama* and the Sufis appear to have supported his independent rule. Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah extended generous patronage to Sufi Shaikhs. Both the *ulama* and the Sufis appear to have worked in favour of his descendants against indigenous interests. Ilyas Shah's reign was marked by an impressive coinage system and monumental structures. Pandua came to be adorned with magnificent buildings of a distinct style. The rule of Alauddin Husain Shah was significant for the growth of Bengali language and literature. The sultan offered high offices to Hindus, a liberal policy that was meant to serve state interests as well. In any case, while the Bengali Hindus learnt Persian to hold administrative positions, the Muslims coming from outside adopted Bengali customs. However, this did not mean the end of all reactionary tendencies in medieval Bengal.

One of the most important developments in the social history of Bengal from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century was the growth of the Muslim community in Bengal. During the thirteenth century, Khalji and Turkish governors and *iqbal-dars* who came to Bengal were followed by scholars, religious people, merchants, and artisans. Before the end of the sixteenth century came Ethiopians, Arabs, Persians, Afghans, and Mughals. Some of the higher-class Bengali Hindus joined Islam and the lower classes accepted the influence of the Sufis. The Chishti order was thoroughly indigenized. The Sufis generally settled as proprietors of land and married local women, gradually integrating with the local society. Muslim Pirs were popular with both Muslims and Hindus. There are references to upper-class Muslims as Khans, Maliks, Umara, Akabar, Ma'arif, Sadat, 'Ulama, and Mashaikh, or as Mongol, Pathan, Makhdum, Saiyid, Mulla, and Qazi. The ruling class and the upper-class Muslims lived in a state of luxury. Polygamy and concubinage were common among them. Then there were Muslim milkmen, weavers, bakers, fish-sellers, paper manufacturers, dyers, tailors, butchers, and sellers of beef. There is evidence to suggest the existence of different classes of Muslims in the countryside: rural magnates, peasants, and slaves.

The Muslim rulers did not interfere with the caste system in which the Brahmans, Vaidyas, and Kayasthas were regarded as the higher castes. The rise of the Kayasthas in government jobs was seen by the Vaishnava poets as a change due perhaps to their large numbers and the privileges they had begun to enjoy. A certain degree of urbanization under the sultans, and development of trade and manufactures modified the predominantly agrarian economy. Middle-class professional groups emerged as important elements, especially physicians and teachers. The position of women did not change appreciably, their place remaining in the home and in the kitchen. Lower-class women could do outdoor work, and could help their husbands in weaving. Diverse trends in literature

were perhaps a reflection of the social situation: a rather liberal and popular Bengali literature flourished side by side with conservative, classical *Nyaya* and *Smṛiti*. There was great emphasis on the revival of the classical system to meet the challenge posed by Islam and bhakti.

In the thirteenth century there were four systems of religious belief and practice in Bengal: worship of village gods, both Vedic and non-Vedic; a local variety of Mahayana Buddhism; jogi practices linked with Shaivism; and Puranic Brahmanism in which Brahma, Shiva, and Chandi were the most important deities. After the Turkish conquest these four systems coalesced into two basic systems: Puranic and non-Puranic. While Mahayana Buddhism merged with Brahmanic worship, Dharma and Manava became the most popular deities in the countryside. The most important religious movement in Bengal was initiated by Chaitanya. His Vaishnavism broke the monopoly of Brahmanas as the only religious guides. The rigour of caste was relaxed, and ideas of untouchability were modified to a great extent. The attitudes of the Vaishnavas influenced the attitudes of the Shaktas. However, the Vaishnava movement failed to dislodge the older religious cults. The daily life of the people was coloured with the fear of the supernatural; the practice of black magic figures widely in contemporary Bengali poetry.

Professor J. B. Bhattacharjee refers to the beginning of state formation in north-eastern India, covering the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura, before the medieval period. The Muslim rulers of Bengal and the Mughals made incursions into the north-east and occupied large chunks of territory from time to time, particularly in areas close to the plains. However, the most important development of the medieval period was the emergence of states from the indigenous and immigrant tribal social bases, notably the Ahom, Dimas, Jaintia, Tripuri, Meitei, and Koch. There were some minor states and chieftaincies too, which survived into the nineteenth century.

Founded by the leaders of the Ahom tribe of South-East Asia, the Ahom state was the largest and the most powerful of all the states. The non-Ahoms were subjected to coercion as slaves and freemen; they were attached to the Ahom king or to Ahom hereditary nobles. Gradually, Assamese was adopted as the official language, and the kings started taking Hindu names. Ahom diplomats were replaced by Brahmanas and Brahmanical influences began to increase in the sixteenth century. The royal family was initiated into the Shakti cult in the early eighteenth century, followed by the nobility. At the same time Vaishnava monasteries were generously patronized with rent-free lands and serfs. The Ahom rulers resisted the Mughal arms during the seventeenth century. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, the Ahom monarchy was on the decline.

All the other states emerged from indigenous social bases. The Dimasas were a section of the Bodos of the Brahmaputra valley. They established their power in lower Assam with Dimapur as their seat of authority. It was sacked by the Ahoms in the fifteenth century, and a new capital was founded at Maibong. Some new territory was conquered by the Dimasas in the Barak valley. Brahmanas traced the kings' descent to Hidimba of the *Mahabharata* and gave them the Kshatriya status. Their goddess was identified with Kali as Ranachandi and her temple was erected in the capital. Bengali was adopted as the official language. The epics and Puranas were translated into Bengali by a galaxy of Brahman scholars enjoying state patronage. In the eighteenth century, Khaspur state merged into Dimasa as the result of a matrimonial alliance, and the capital was shifted to Khaspur.

The Tripuris ruled in parts of the Sylhet-Cachar region till the thirteenth century and then moved to modern Tripura with their capital at Kailashahar first, then Udaypur, and finally Agartala. Ratan Manikya was recognized as the maharaja of Tripura by the sultans of

Bengal in the fifteenth century. He encouraged a large number of Brahmans, Vaidyas, and Kayasthas of Bengal to settle them in Tripura. Official documents and chronicles were written in Bengali.

The Jaintias were matrilineal, but their affairs were managed by an elitist stratum of adult males. The state was formed by a voluntary union of twelve socio-political units, probably in response to the emergence of larger states in the neighbouring plain. They got their name from Jayantipur in the Sylhet plains which was the seat of an earlier state called Jayantia. Myths were created to give the ruling family a divine descent and to connect it with Jayanta Roy of the old Jayantia kingdom. With the exception of the last king, Rajendra Singha, who became a Vaishnava, the rulers of Jaintia were Shaktas. The ancient temple of Jayanteshwari (Kali) was maintained in Jaintipur and new temples were built at other places. The kings consulted the chiefs in all important matters, and gave rent-free lands to temples and Brahmans. The *raj pandit* occupied a special place in the official hierarchy.

The Meitei society consisted of seven clans. Kingship came into existence when one of the seven clans established its supremacy over the others in the thirteenth century. The Meitei kings of the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries subdued many tribal chiefs within Manipur. Vaishnavism made a deep impact on the society through Ramanandis and Goswamis of the Chaitanya school. King Kyaamba (1467–1508) built a Vishnu temple at Bishanpur and the first Meitei king to be formally initiated into Vaishnavism was Charai Rongha (1698–1709). The Meitei language and scripts were replaced by Bengali and Sanskrit. The title of the king was changed from Lainingthou to Maharaja in the reign of Garib Nawaz (1709–48), who established his dominance over the hill tribes and fought several battles with the Burmese.

The Koch Bihar state was founded in the Goalpara area of lower Assam in the fifteenth century when Haria Mandal of Chikgrama village was recognized as the head of twelve leading families or Bhuyans of the area. His son, Biswa Singh, shifted the capital to Koch Bihar. He worshipped Shiva and Durga, gave gifts to the worshippers of Vishnu; granted lands to temples, priests, and astrologers; invited Brahmans from Kanauj, Varanasi, and other centres of learning, and rebuilt the temple of Kamakshya near Guwahati. Nara Narayan (1540–84), the greatest of the Koch kings, established his supremacy over the Ahom, Jaintia, Dimasa, Meitei, and Tripuri rulers. In the seventeenth century, the Koch rulers became tributary to the Mughals.

The emergence of all these states was the result of the aspiration of tribal chiefs to establish their authority over others. Their own conflicts and external aggression from the Turks, Afghans, and Mughals accentuated the process in which weaker tribes and clans submitted to the authority of the more powerful for protection. The genealogical links and relative hierarchy were maintained even after the emergence of the states. Chieftains within the principalities were allowed some autonomy by way of accommodation, such chieftaincies sometimes being created as buffers. New ethnic and social identities emerged in the process of state formation. Brahmanical influence played a major role in legitimizing authority and the royal priests enjoyed important positions in every state. The kings patronized Brahmans and temples. The concept of the state as a common identity substantially influenced the social and economic life of the people in all the states and contributed to the growth of larger identities.

Significantly, the larger portion of the hill areas in the region remained outside these states, and different tribes continued to maintain their own traditions and political systems. They managed their affairs through self-governing institutions. Among such tribes were Garos, Khasis, Nagas, Kukis, Lushais, Akas, Khamptis, Singphos, Adis, and Tawangs. The tribes generally lived in feud with one another, which continued for generations. They

selected inaccessible sites for their villages, barricaded them with trees, and planted bamboo spikes on possible approaches. Kinship dominated the social structure, as most of the tribes were generally endogamous. Features of a stratified society, however, were clearly visible in almost all tribal groups. They were broadly divided into freemen and slaves. Polygamy was common among some tribes and polyandry among some others. The raising of crops was the work of the menfolk, but the women assisted them in the fields, besides doing household work and weaving.

Temples to various gods were built and maintained, and the epics and *Purāṇas* popularized. Shankaradeva introduced neo-Vaishnavism in Assam and Koch Bihar. Gaudiya Vaishnavism was influential in the Barak valley and Manipur. Shaktism continued to be the dominant cult in Jaintia and Tripura. Islam was represented by dargahs of *pirs* as well as mosques and the dargahs were visited by Hindus as well as Muslims. There were a few Sikh *gurdwaras* in Assam. Animism was the dominant theme in the religious traditions of the hill tribes. The number of deities was large in every tribe and there were several rituals to perform. Sorcery was considered to be the antidote to famines, sickness, and misfortunes caused by the influence of some unknown and invisible agents. The priests read omens by breaking eggs or examining the entrails of chickens.

The states and societies in the north-east were at different stages of development. The tribal communities in the hills were mostly pastoral and shifting cultivation was practised. State capitals, transit stations, and markets were the only urban places. Literature, art, and music were patronized by the rulers, and encouraged by neo-Vaishnavism. The advent of Vaishnavism in Manipur gave rise to the Manipur style of dance. The economy on the whole was not monetized. The stratification process was complete in the settled groups, with wealth and social status being the privilege of the few. Even in tribal societies an upper stratum had emerged.

Professor M.P. Joshi takes up the polity, economy, and society of Kumaon and Garhwal under three states: the kingdom of the Katyuris, which covered the entire region, the kingdom of the Chandras, which covered only Kumaon, and the kingdom of the Pamvaras, which covered only Garhwal. The palmy days of the Katyuri state were over by the eleventh century when its power began to decline due probably to contending political ambitions of different families. The junior lines of the dynasty, who had held administrative charge of the provinces of the kingdom, began severally to declare their independence, and there are inscriptions of the later Katyuris of Doti-Dandeldhura, Sira, Sor, Ascot, Pali, and Baramandal as well as Katyur. These polities struggled with one another for political supremacy till the Chandras came out victorious in Kumaon during the thirteenth century, and the Pamvaras in Garhwal during the fifteenth.

The Katyuri copperplate inscriptions in the Siddhamatrika characters show that the state had an elaborate administrative and military organization in the ninth and tenth centuries. This implies availability of social surplus. This implication is reinforced by the evidence of the religious, artistic, and architectural activities of the period. There are references to traders and foremen of guilds. Probably the Katyuris collected a considerable amount of tax from trade. They did not issue coins, but there are references to monetary transactions. More important, for exchange of goods or produce, however, were the barter and *jajmani* systems. Agriculture was the main vocation of the people, while cattle rearing was an important occupation. There were weavers, tailors, embroiderers, dyers, printers, cobblers, goldsmiths, jewellers, and lapidaries for articles of dress and ornaments. The potter's craft was also well developed. Brahmanical culture had taken deep roots through royal patronage and religious establishments. Shiva was the most popular deity, followed by Shakti, Vishnu, Surya, Ganesh, and Kartikeya, but there

were many other objects of adoration. A significant cultural phenomenon of the period was the development of the language of the people, independently of Sanskrit and Prakrit.

The history of the Chandras of Kumaon appears to form two clear phases: the formative phase, with Champavat as their capital (1250–1525); and the consolidated *rajya*, with Almora as their capital (1525–1790). There was no regular army of the state; its authority rested on a control system centred on the capital, tying together a number of epicentric subordinate principalities. Three factors accounted for the genesis of 'dominant groups' in each valley: physical configuration, the need of collective effort for irrigational works, and the need of exchange through trade. 'Dominant persons' recognized and strengthened the institution of kingship from which emanated the validation of their own authority. They subscribed to an ideology popularized by the Brahmans as a socio-political mechanism for establishing politico-cultural hegemony of the so-called 'immigrant high castes', the Brahmans and Kshatriyas. The rulers of Kumaon maintained their sovereignty, occasionally paying tribute to the Mughals to maintain their territorial integrity. The polity of Garhwal was very much similar to that of Kumaon.

Like the Chandras, the Pamvaras shifted their capital from Chandpurgarhi to Srinagar. The courts at the capitals of Kumaon and Garhwal were divided into factions. Their intrigues, coupled with the wars between the two states, and occasional inroads of the neighbouring polities, gave ample opportunities to the dominant groups to make new alignments in different situations. In both Kumaon and Garhwal there were institutional bodies of Brahmans and Kshatriyas, which were consulted for administrative purposes. The Vaishyas appear to have been the least influential in the absence of any appreciable degree of urbanization. The Kshatriyas were associated with both trade and agriculture. Trade was carried largely by the Saukas (Bhotiyas). The Shudras could serve items like *ghee*, oil, and milk to the higher-caste social groups. At times they served as priests. Like the Brahmans and the Kshatriyas, the Shudras had their own institutional bodies, which too were consulted in administrative matters.

The people worshipped a number of deities besides Shiva, Vishnu, and Shakti. Popular among the people was the worship of Bhairava in different forms, and some of the rulers patronized Gorakhnathi *jogis*. Worship of Rama, Krishna, and Hanuman also was becoming popular. Then there were a number of local deities. Tantric practices were prevalent, and there are signs of human sacrifice. Several Sanskrit works were composed on astrology, *tantra*, *ayurveda*, *vastushastra*, and *dharmaśāstra*, and grammar and literature. Some of the classical works were translated into the regional language, which was becoming increasingly important. The art and architecture of these states does not show any qualitative refinement. In the late seventeenth century the Garhwal school of painting developed. Clay and metal sculpture were made on a large scale in Garhwal for pilgrims.

The economy of Kumaon and Garhwal remained predominantly agricultural. With the exception of a few Pamvara chiefs, no ruler issued coins. A large number of silver and copper coins found in the states belonged to the Muslim and non-Muslim rulers of India and Nepal, indicating a favourable balance of trade. A good amount of coins must have been brought by pilgrims to the time-honoured shrines of Badri and Kedar. Numerous articles of export from the region, consisting mostly of natural produce, are mentioned in Persian works of the Mughal period. Other than agriculture, the vocations of cattle rearing, sheep farming, and production of woollen materials were important. A four-tier socio-economic organization in the region can be visualized. The lowest class was that of the labourers. The tenant cultivators known as *kainis* and the artisans who subsisted partly on agriculture were above the labourers. Above the *kainis* were the landowning agriculturists

and absentee landowners, including all the state functionaries who received land grants. At the top was the chief himself who was considered to be the ultimate owner of the land. People were required to contribute in cash and kind for the maintenance of the state. Demands in kind depended on local, regional, or ecological considerations. Caste-specific demands were also made. The state promoted the *jajmani* system at the village level for its own purposes. The integrative polity, demands made by it in accordance with the social, economic, and ecological conditions of the taxpayers, economic management based on reciprocity and redistribution, and contentment of the common people with their lot could account for the survival of these states without any permanent physical force at the disposal of the rulers.

Professor J.S. Grewal and Dr Veena Sachdeva point out that the process of state formation in the western Himalayas had begun before the Christian era. Thakurs had risen into local power from among the indigenous people, and lost supremacy to Ranas who entered the hills later. Both of them were subdued by the founders of new states in the first millennium after Christ. New states continued to emerge during the medieval period, mostly as offshoots of these established earlier. The total number of states in the western Himalayas was very large. They were never completely isolated from the politics of the plains, which continued to have some direct and indirect influence on the polity and society in the hills. For the state and society in the western Himalayas, Professor Grewal and Dr Sachdeva concentrate on Kangra, Chamba, and Kulu, which were the oldest and the most important states of Himachal.

In the eleventh century, Kangra was a part of the state of Trigarta or Jalandhara, with its territories in the hills as well as the plains. Before the end of the century the plain territories were lost to Sultan Ibrahim of Ghazni and the state was confined to the hills with its capital at Nagarkot or Kangra. A few offshoots reduced the territory further. The rulers of Kangra acknowledged the overlordship of the sultans of Delhi from time to time before Akbar established his suzerainty over the hills. The fort of Kangra was occupied by the Mughals in the reign of Jahangir and the ruler of Kangra was assigned a jagir for his maintenance. The fortunes of Kangra were at their lowest ebb in the reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan. Raja Hamir Chand set the state on the course of recovery and Kangra regained much of its past glory in the second half of the eighteenth century under Ghamand Chand and Sansar Chand. The latter recovered even the fort of Kangra in 1786, and established his overlordship in the neighbouring hill states. Early in the nineteenth century, however, Sansar Chand lost the fort with all the sixty-six villages attached to it, and he himself became tributary to Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Eventually, Kangra was annexed to the kingdom of Lahore after its existence as a state for over two hundred years.

Kangra under Sansar Chand was divided into three provinces, and each province was divided into *talukas* that had survived unchanged from the earliest times; each taluka was divided into *tappas* and villages. Since the taluka in earlier times was called *kotwali*, its officer was called *kotwal*. He was remunerated with revenue-free land, and assisted by an accountant (*kail* or *likhneera*), the keeper of the granary (*kotiala*), some constables, messengers, and forest watchers. Each hamlet or village had its headman (*muqaddam*) and a watchman (*chaukidar*, *batwal*, or *karunk*). The areas included in the imperial desmenes had *chaudharis* and *qanungos*. The raja was the supreme head of the state and exercised religious, feudal, and personal authority. He was expected to uphold the *varnashrama dharma*. Each interest in land was held directly from the raja as a separate holding or tenancy. He conferred the right of inheritance (*warisi*), but never the right of proprietorship (*maliki*). The chief holders of rent-free lands were the descendants of cadets of the royal family,

known as Jaikari Rajputs. The raja granted lands to Brahmans and temples by way of *dharmarth*. The cultivators were degraded into mere tenants at will. All houses in the state were more or less detached and each house had a small patch of land within its enclosure called *lahri*.

The total population of Kangra towards the end of the eighteenth century was not much more than 300,000. The Brahmans, Rajputs, and Vaishyas formed only a small proportion of the total population. The purest among the Brahmans performed religious duties, but most of them held lands, lent money, engaged in service, and entered any secular pursuit that promised subsistence. They ate meat. As a class, they were regarded as the highest. Next to them in status were Rajputs who did not touch the plough. Their women observed seclusion, and their widows were not allowed to remarry. The Khattris, Kaits, Mahajans, Suds, and Karars were regarded as Vaishyas. Much of the petty trade was in their hands. The Gaddis as a generic name included Brahmans, Rajputs, Khattris, and Rathis, but the greater part of their wealth consisted of flocks of sheep and goats. The Gujars with their herds of buffaloes moved from place to place according to the seasons. Their women sold milk and milk products in local markets. Far more numerous were the Rathis who lived in the hilly tracts and the Ghiraths who lived in the valleys. They were essentially agriculturists and regarded as Shudras. Below them in rank were artisans, followed by the menial castes who provided labour and begar, and were regarded literally as untouchable. Even their accidental touch carried defilement. Female infanticide was practised by the upper castes, and child marriage by all classes of people. Polygamy was allowed by all and widow remarriage by the lower classes. On the whole, lower-class women had a better position in relation to men than the women of higher castes. People worshipped a large number of deities. The Goddess was probably more popular than Shiva or Vishnu, or any other high god, and even more popular were the local deities. The Kangra rulers patronized painters in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many of their themes derived from the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Mahabharata*.

The Chamba state in the early eleventh century was under the political influence of Kashmir. Before the end of the twelfth century, however, the ruler of Chamba became independent of outside powers and the state remained so till the time of Akbar. For more than a hundred and fifty years it then remained tributary to the Mughals. In the early seventeenth century, Raja Jagat Singh of Nurpur ruled over Chamba through his officials for twenty years. The state was recovered by Raja Prithvi Singh who had accepted a *mansab* from Shah Jahan. Raja Chatar Singh of Chamba accepted a *mansab* from Aurangzeb, but defied his order of 1669 for the demolition of all temples. Throughout the late eighteenth century the rulers of Chamba had good diplomatic relations with the Mughals, Afghans, and Sikhs. Raja Raj Singh of Chamba came into a sustained conflict with Sansar Chand of Kangra over the issue of supremacy in the hills, and died fighting in 1794. In the early decades of the nineteenth century Chamba became tributary to Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Unlike Kangra, however, it was never annexed to the kingdom of Lahore and survived into the twentieth century under British paramountcy. Members of a single dynasty ruled over the state for nearly fourteen centuries.

For administrative purposes Chamba was divided into five *wazarats*, each division forming a sub-region marked by differences of climate, people, and products. Each *wazarat* was divided into *mandalas*, later known as parganas. The headquarters of the pargana official, called *char*, had a state *kothi*. He was assisted by a *likhneara* and a *batwal*, besides several other functionaries. They were allowed to collect certain emoluments in cash and kind as a separate charge on the *malguzar*. The land tenures in Chamba were similar to the land

tenures in Kangra, and so was the system of *begar*. The raja alienated revenues in favour of those who served the state. Most of these jagirdars in Chamba were Ranas but the collaterals of the ruling chiefs also held jagirs. It was customary for the rajas to give rent-free lands to temples and Brahmans. The state presents some very striking examples of such grants. There was a long tradition of sculpture in metal and stone, and woodcarving and frescos in temples. The rulers of Chamba became great patrons of painting in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

With an area of 3,000 square miles, Chamba had a total population of less than 120,000, concentrated in the capital and the cultivated areas. The number of Rajputs was less than 5,000, but they occupied a prominent position in the state. A small aristocracy below the raja and many of the jagirdars were Rajputs. The Brahmans exceeded 15,000, with a considerable number in the capital. A large number of Brahmans were engaged in agriculture and pastoral pursuits. Many of them acted as priests and *purohita*. The Rathis, numbering about 38,000, formed the largest single caste in Chamba. The Thakurs were closely allied with them, but wore the sacred thread and ranked a little higher. They formed the great cultivating community of Chamba and also provided soldiers for the army. The oldest inhabitants, reduced to the position of *chandalas*, formed nearly a fourth of the total population. The Gaddis of Chamba were similar to the Gaddis of Kangra. There were more Muslims in the state than the Rajputs, but nearly all in its capital and the *churah wazarat*. Polygamy was the rule in Chamba; divorce and remarriage were common among the lower classes. There was a strong tradition of chivalry among the Rajputs and Ranas, and the practice of *sati* was not uncommon among them.

Shiva, Vishnu, and Shakti were the major deities in Chamba. The Brahmaur pargana, with Mani Mahesh, was known as Shiva's land (*Shivbhumi*). Animal sacrifice was a common feature of Shiva's worship. The cult of the goddess as Durga and Bhagvati (and later Mahalakshmi) was popular in Chamba, and traditions of human sacrifice in olden times were still current. Among the other deities were Vishnu, Narasimha, Ganesh, Kartikeya, and Varun. The rulers of Chamba patronized all major systems of religious belief and practices. The painters chose their themes from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Bhagavata Purana*, and *Durga-Saptshati*. The rajas of Chamba took a good deal of interest in the worship of Rama and Krishna during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Buddhism survived in association with the Devi and Nag cults. Among the popular objects of worship were Siddhai, Gugga, and Sakhi Sarvar. Popular religion was manifested in many forms. The religious beliefs and practices of the common people were represented by popular cults and primordial beliefs. The language in the inscriptions of Chamba was Sanskrit in the early centuries of the medieval period; towards its end it was the regional language, the language of the people. Takri replaced Sharda as the script.

The political history of Kulu during the medieval period falls into two broad phases before 1500 under the Pal dynasty and after 1500 under the Singh or Badani dynasty. Only the latter phase was marked by an effective subjugation of Ranas and Thakurs who were either eliminated or made jagirdars of the state. Kulu became subordinate to the Mughals from the time of Akbar. Raja Jagat Singh's loyalty to the Mughal suzerain enabled him to enlarge and consolidate his kingdom in the time of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. Kulu became tributary to Maharaja Ranjit Singh early in the nineteenth century, and was annexed to the kingdom of Lahore in the 1840s. Like Kangra, thus, the state vanished after its existence for more than a thousand years.

The primary divisions for administration in Kulu were *wazirs*, each divided into a number of *kothis*. The headman of the *kothi* was called *wagi*, and each *kothi* contained a

number of villages with a headman and a watchman (*kronki*). The system of *begar* was generally prevalent in Kulu, though the headmen were exempt. In a total population of over 100,000, the number of Brahmans was less than 7,000 and that of Rajputs less than 300. Despite their small proportion in the total population, the Brahmans and Rajputs held nearly one-third of the land, much of the rent-free land being in the hands of Brahmans. The Khattris, Bantias, Suds, Mahajans, Bhatts, and Kaits, who were placed below the Brahmans and Rajputs, were no more than 1,000 in number. The Kanets were low-caste cultivators and ranked above the Dagis who included the outcastes. Together, they formed nearly four-fifths of the total population. The bulk of the population lived in villages. The women of Kulu resented oppression and ill-use; the practice of *sati* was confined to Rajput families.

The Shaiva, Gorakhnathi, and Vaishnava systems were partly represented by Gosains, Naths, and Bairagis. Old temples in Kulu were dedicated to Shiva and Shakti. But the new temple of Raghunathji, built at Salkanpar by Raja Jagat Singh (1640–70), received the most generous patronage. The temple of the goddess Hidimba was associated with Bhima of the *Mahabharata*, and served as a sanctuary. Small shrines were found everywhere, and almost every village had a local *dev* or *devi*. Kulu was known for its seasonal fairs. The most important was the Dasehra festival of Kulu, which brought all its gods and goddesses to the capital to pay their homage to Raghunathji. The entry of Raghunathji into Kulu was symbolic of Vaishnava influences that had begun to appear in the state during the seventeenth century. The painters of Kulu chose themes from the epics and the *Bhagavata Purana* for treatment under the patronage of the *raj*s. The ideology of these works was suitable for a conservative and patriarchal society in which *varnashrama dharma* was upheld in theory and was sought to be upheld in practice.

For the state and society in the Punjab, Professor Indu Banga refers to an independent, though incipient, state set up for a few years by Banda Bahadur with the support of the Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh in the second decade of the eighteenth century. That his example was never forgotten by the Khalsa is evident from the fact that they used the same inscription on their coins in 1765 and later coins as used by Banda on his seal. These inscriptions derived sovereignty from god and the gurus. Their optimistic belief in their ultimate success (*raj karega Khalsa*), gave the necessary motivation, and the doctrines of Guru Panth and Guru Granth, which became current among the Khalsa in the early eighteenth century, gave them the needed cohesion. They evolved a system in which the collective decisions of the Khalsa (*gurmata*), which were morally binding on all, and the concerted action of their forces (*Deh Khater*) under a single leader saw them through a grim political struggle against the Mughals and the Afghans till they declared their sovereignty once again by striking a coin at Lahore in 1765.

Professor Banga underlines that neither the stereotype of twelve *misls* nor that of the *misldar* system carries much significance for the eighteenth-century Sikh polity. The derivation of sovereignty from god and the gurus made each territorial chief independent of others, whether Sikh or non-Sikh. There was no external or constitutional check on the exercise of political power by a Sikh chief in his territory. The principle of hereditary succession was recognized by all. Ranjit Singh, thus, was a chief of the third generation when he succeeded his father Mahan Singh, son of Charhat Singh, in 1790. A fresh spurt of Afghan invasions induced him to occupy Lahore in 1799 and to emerge as the central figure in regional politics. Within a decade he succeeded in unifying the disparate centres of power created by the Sikhs. His rule was marked by expansion and consolidation rather than any significant shift in ideology. His jealous regard for sovereignty as a gift from the gurus aligned him with his eighteenth-century predecessors.

The structure of administration at the pargana level had not changed in the late eighteenth century. When Ranjit Singh expanded his dominions he created larger units for administration so that the whole territory was divided into half a dozen provinces, each under a governor (*nazim*) directly responsible to him. Detailed information about administrative functioning at the provincial and pargana levels reinforces the impression of similarities with the pre-Sikh arrangements. This does not mean, however, that Sikh ideology had no bearing on the Sikh states. The descendants of the gurus, especially the Bedis and the Sodhis, received generous grants and jagirs, and gurdwaras associated with the gurus, especially the Golden Temple at Amritsar, received revenue-free lands and regular offerings. Consequently, a larger proportion of revenues was alienated by way of dharmarth now than ever before. The Sikh rulers were particular about impartial and ready justice. Apart from continuing the *qazi*'s court at places, special officers (*adalats*) were appointed by Ranjit Singh. Punishments were lenient. The larger proportion of the modernized as well as the traditional cavalry consisted of the Khalsa who were inducted into infantry and artillery as well.

Various kinds of religious, secular, occupational, tribal, and caste interests were sought to be accommodated in the jagirdari system and revenue administration. The strengthening of the cash nexus was a significant feature of the Sikh rule. Special consideration was shown to the actual cultivators of land and those who helped in agrarian expansion. The rates of assessment remained relatively low, due probably to the eighteenth-century background of the *rakhi* system in which only one-fourth of the produce was collected as revenue. In contrast, in some other regions of India, the position of the ta'alluqdars was depressed in the Punjab during the early nineteenth century. The formation of a regional polity for nearly a century was marked by an unprecedented involvement of the people in the whole process. The largest degree of social mobility was evident in the ruling class, which had the larger proportion of individuals with the background of the lower and middling strata of the social order. The consciousness of Punjabi regional identity became much stronger than ever before.

IV

The papers of the fourth part relate to tribal organization, the village community, urbanization, slavery, gender relations, and the socio-cultural configuration of Akbar in contemporary and later literature.

Professor Irfan Habib suggests that various definitions of tribe point to search for tribal organization in India among the non-sedentary or semi-sedentary populations. There is evidence for the existence of food-gathering and hunting communities in the Deccan where the forest tribes had a rudimentary kind of internal organization. Another known example is that of the Nagas in Assam whose chiefs could proffer a nominal allegiance to the Ahom court. Not much is known about their organization either. The people about whose organization some contemporary evidence is available are the Afghans.

In the fourteenth century, the Afghans lived in the mountains and tableland west of the Takht-i Sulaiman on the border of Baluchistan with the North-West frontier province (NWFP) in Pakistan. According to Babur, the Afghans lived in the steppe plains (*dash*) south of Kabul but north of Duki (north-east Baluchistan), where pastoralism must have furnished their principal means of subsistence. In the *Ām-i Ākbari*, the Afghans living to the north of Qandahar paid 26,421 heads of sheep as tax. By the sixteenth century the

Afghans had become established in the territory stretching from Kabul to the Indus. Their migrations were not necessarily peaceful and this might be an important reason for their organization into tribes. The division of Afghans into a multiplicity of tribes seems to have taken place with their northward expansion. Babur names at least nine Afghan tribes.

The origin and development of Afghan tribes is generally explained in terms of descent and language. However, descent was not from males alone. There was no endogamy among the tribes. Cultivation was combined with pastoral pursuits in many areas and alongside agriculture, trade became increasingly important in the life of the Afghans. Both agriculture and trade subsisted on individual property, whereas collective claims on land were important for nomadism. Sedentary and commercial life inevitably led to conditions of social hierarchy. *Jirga* did exist as an essential instrument for inter-tribal consultation and action and judicial cases too went before a *jirga* in which *khans* and *maliks* were assisted by the *mullas* and even by persons of inferior rank. It represented a kind of primitive aristocracy. In many cases, however, powerful chiefs (*khans*) would act without caring to call a *jirga*.

Professor Irfan Habib defines the village as a settlement essentially of peasants who live together for security and exchange of essential goods and services among themselves. A village community may be deemed to exist wherever some institutional or social networks arise within the village involving its entire population in some form of cooperation. Neither equality nor democracy had to be an essential characteristic of the village community. Evidence from the first millennium after Christ suggests stratification in villages, closely linked with caste, ranging from the Brahman to the Chandala. The affairs of the village were managed by the 'great men of the village'. In south India during the Chola period the *sabhas* in the brahmadeya villages took the form of renters' corporations of superior landholders. In the ordinary villages the privileges of the assembly (*ur*) would be more limited than those of the Brahmanical *sabhas*. There was a stratum of 'tenant cultivators' (*kudi*), and '*pariah*' who provided cheap or forced agricultural labour, and there were also slaves. Evidence from the Deccan, Gujarat, and north India supports the existence of stratification in villages into landholders, artisans, and labourers. Indeed, there was an unalterable division of labour set by the system of castes in pre-Mughal times.

In Mughal India the village constituted a fiscal unit. What transpired within the village in fiscal arrangements was the function of the headman (*muqaddam*) whose position was hereditary. The accounts of what was assessed, collected, and paid were kept by the hereditary *patwari*. The natural condition of the village community in the official view was one of oligarchy and not of equality or democracy. There are references to *panchas* besides *muqaddams*, and even to *panch-muqaddams* in villages who acted in concert. No two *panchas* in one set of documents appear to be descended from the same father or grandfather. Therefore, the Indian village community cannot be regarded as an extension of the joint family. There was a common pool of the village as a corporate body. The village headmen acted in concert as the village oligarchs to dispose of this pool and the land belonging to the village as a whole. Plots of land were allotted to some artisans and other service-performing individuals from the land belonging to the village. These allotments were recognized by the government as revenue free, recognizing in a sense the need as well as the existence of the village as a social unit with its hierarchical relationships. In the concept of *jajmani* the village as a social unit recedes into the background and the caste system comes to the fore.

Dr Reeta Grewal takes up the phenomena of urbanization in medieval India with reference to the scholarly literature produced on the subject in the twentieth century,

especially in its last quarter. K.M. Ashraf's treatment of the 'social conditions' in northern India during the period, mainly of the Delhi sultanate, showed that there are various aspects of urbanization: role of the rulers, town planning, urban morphology, functions of towns and cities, trade and manufacture, urban life, and the role of port cities. Professor Muhammad Habib put forth the hypothesis of 'urban revolution' in northern India under the Turks due to the emancipation of city workers and the city labourers. In his view Delhi aptly symbolized this revolution as one of the greatest cities of the world. With better evidence, Professor Irfan Habib has argued in favour of extensive urbanization due to political, economic, social, and technological changes, but without 'liberation' of any section of the society. In fact, the sultans did not attack the caste system, and slave labour acquired crucial importance in the urban economy of the Turkish period.

W.H. Moreland's comments on urbanization in Mughal India embraced the size and distribution of urban centres, city administration and its effect on trade and production, urban industries and their organization, seaports, trade routes and organization of trade, the various classes of people living in towns and cities, and their style of living. On the whole, the upper classes were small in numbers, but their incomes were far in excess of their reasonable needs and they spent lavishly on objects of luxury and display. The merchants and men of business, like the rest of the middle classes, lived rather inconspicuously, except in the coastal cities. The mass of the people, including craftsmen and labourers, slaves, and domestic servants, enjoyed practically nothing by way of communal services or advantages. The economic system on the whole operated in favour of the urban population. A large proportion of the profits earned in villages was transferred to towns through the working of the revenue administration. 'Weavers, naked themselves, toiled to clothe others. Peasants, themselves hungry, toiled to feed the towns and cities.' Thus, the process of urbanization was essentially parasitic.

In H.K. Naqvi's view, this was not 'a correct assessment of the situation' because urban markets provided material stimulus and strong encouragement to the rural producer for increasing output. However, this statement does not meet Moreland's argument. Much of Naqvi's work amplifies Moreland's observations on urban centres and urban industries. The cosmopolitan cities of Agra, Lahore, and Delhi reflected the highest level of economic, educational, cultural, and social developments of the centuries from the sixteenth to the eighteenth. The commercial cities of Patna and Benaras were next in rank to the capital cities. Then there were centres of pilgrimage and specialized craft production, which developed into cities or towns. Like Professor Muhammad Habib, Naqvi ascribes a significant role to Islam in the migration of craftsmen to towns and cities. The pre-Mughal period provided the requisite background for a spurt of urban centres during the Mughal period, but this process of urbanization was affected adversely by the 'anarchy' in northern India after Aurangzeb's death.

More recent work by a number of scholars shows that urbanization in northern India had begun before the advent of the Turks. In fact, the phenomenon of urbanization was widely distributed geographically so as to cover Malwa, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Andhra, and Karnataka as well as the Upper Ganga basin and the Indo-Gangetic divide. The history of south India from the ninth to the twelfth centuries was marked by the expansion of rural settlements and the growth of urban centres. Trade, commodity production, organizations of trading communities, and religious institutions played a significant role in this process. The number of market towns, cities, and port towns increased considerably in Karnataka during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Information on their morphology and administration indicates the importance of mercantile communities and guilds of

merchants. Thus, both in the north and the south the process of urbanization had started in the pre-Turkish centuries.

The process of urbanization was accelerated in the north by the establishment of the sultanate of Delhi as a large and relatively centralized state. The growth of towns stood in dialectical relationship to trade, improved means of communication, a sound currency system, and agrarian and craft production. The economic life of towns was dominated by the nobles and their retinues, traders, and shopkeepers, but the larger section of the urban population consisted of artisans and craftsmen, peddlers, soldiers, slaves, servants, labourers, and beggars. Under Firoz Tughluq, the sultanate of Delhi shrank to half of its former size, but there was no shrinkage of towns. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries represent 'the golden age of urbanization' for much of northern and central India. The proportion of urban population in the total appears to have increased, approaching 15 per cent. The view that the decline of the Mughal empire resulted in de-urbanization has been modified. New urban centres were coming up simultaneously with the decline of the old. In the south, till the eighteenth century, urbanization was an extremely important historical process, a summation in a sense of the most important economic, political, and cultural trends. The reports of 'ruined' towns come from the early nineteenth century.

Information on different regions of the country leads to better appreciation of the processes of urbanization and its various aspects, as on Gujarat, Rajasthan, Bengal, and the Punjab. This is true of information on individual cities and towns: Agra, Delhi, Shahjahanabad, Pune, Sirhind, Batala, and Amritsar. Information on port towns in general and the port cities of Surat, Masulipatnam, and Cambay in particular clearly indicates that the fortunes of the ports depended very much on their hinterland. The most important region for the port towns was Gujarat, followed by Malabar and then by Coromandal and Bengal. The decline of some indigenous merchants was due less to 'free-trade' competition with Europeans than to the deployment of force by the East India Company, both on land and the sea, to claim and enforce privileges at all crucial turns.

Professor Irfan Habib points out that the institution of slavery was fairly well developed in India in ancient times. Both male and female slaves were regarded as articles of property that could be sold or gifted away. Islam too accepted the status of slave as fully legal: the master was the owner, and the slave could be inherited, sold away, or gifted. A man could have any number of concubines, carrying the implication of forced sexual relationship on the female slave. All the possessions of the slaves and their earnings belonged to the master. An interesting feature of the institution were the 'elite-slaves' trained to become officers and commanders, some of whom even ascended the throne as sultans. The importance of 'elite-slaves' decreased after the fourteenth century and their existence had little bearing on the position of the mass of slaves. Wars and campaigns served as the major source of obtaining slaves. Their low price relative to other goods reflected the massive influx of slaves into the market and much work in crafts and commerce was carried on by slaves on behalf of their masters. The sultans and the nobles had enormous numbers of slaves, both male and female, apart from the large number of 'elite-slaves' and concubines. Enslavement for Indians meant change of religion and loss of caste. Both Sufis and theologians regarded manumission of slaves as meritorious, but there was no sympathy for the slave who tried to run away.

Babur's silence on the plenitude of slaves in India suggests a change in the situation. A few influential theologians of the fifteenth century had argued in fact that enslavement of non-Muslim inhabitants of villages in rebel territory was unlawful. Akbar took a number of

steps to ensure that women and children were not enslaved. The sale and purchase of slaves was also prohibited. Akbar freed 'hundreds and thousands' of slaves and gave them the option to remain in service with pay or to go away. Jahangir banned castration and trade in child eunuchs. However, the institution of slavery lingered on. Times of scarcity and famine meant offers of children for sale. Many such examples are known from the seventeenth century. Even the 'elite-slaves' continued to be raised on a small scale till the eighteenth century. There is evidence also of the diverse work to which the slaves were put: agricultural labour at places on a limited scale, employment in trade, concubinage, dancing, and domestic work.

Professor Indu Banga points out that relations of power are implicit in the term 'gender' used for relations between men and women as social entities. K.M. Ashraf, who looked at the issue of gender relations from political, economic, and social perspectives, observed that the patriarchal idea permeated 'the whole social system'. There were differences of degree in the position of women according to caste, class, community, or region. However, Ashraf himself concentrates on the institutions of family, domestic slavery, sati and *jauhar*, *haram* and *pardah*, and prostitution—all of which represented the utter subordination of women to patriarchal values and structures. The sacred scriptures sanctified woman's subordination. Even the *Quran* lays down that men are superior to women on account of god-given qualities.

The evidence of Alberuni in the early eleventh century brings out the essential subordination of woman and her 'disabilities'. Actually, he was relying on Sanskrit works like the *Manusmriti*. The Smriti works of the pre-Mughal centuries extensively invoke the *Manusmriti* and its doctrines of perpetual subjection of women to their male relations as daughters, wives, and mothers. There was some improvement in the rights of women to property. The authors who treat self-immolation as optional, insist on the strict observance of the vows prescribed for the widow. On the whole, however, it was more meritorious to become a *sati*. The available empirical evidence on gender relations indicates that social realities in most parts of the Indian subcontinent were not far different from the prescribed norms. The sultan's permission was necessary for burning a widow but it was accorded as a matter of routine. If Ibn Battuta expresses his horror, Amir Khusrau expresses his admiration for the custom. Both sati and *jauhar* were much older than Turkish rule in India. Myth, religion, custom, patriarchal family, and patriarchal values could lead to the deification of the sati to place her even above male martyrs.

The position of women in the Muslim component of society in pre-Mughal India was different in some ways, both in theory and practice. The *Quran* recommends the manumission of slaves and forbids the prostitution of slave girls. The practice of female infanticide is forbidden. Segregation of sexes is not advocated. However, the rights of men and women are not exactly equal: 'men are one degree higher than women' and they are managers over women. A male child inherits the equivalent of two females, while the widow inherits only a part of her husband's property. The husband can beat the wife, but without causing injury. Deviation from the Quranic norms are reflected in Hadis literature: a woman is weaker than man in religion, as in intelligence. The actual enactments of Muslim governments were different from the norms even of the Hadis. The elimination of women from public and social life was complete by the time of Harun al-Rashid. The harsh disapproval of the learned succeeded in driving women outside the mosque. In the sultanate of Delhi individual women played a more or less important role in politics, and some women were known for their piety and spiritual attainment. The Chishti Shaikhs also advocated the manumission of slaves, both male and female. Instances of enslaved Hindu women being returned to their homes are known and female slaves and concubines were com-

mon. Some of the female slaves were given education and training to become courtesans to adorn the parties of sultans and nobles.

There is more information on gender relations during the Mughal period. Abul Fazl describes the imperial harem in detail, and European travellers describe the orderly seclusion of royal women on travel. Akbar expressed his views against polygamy, child marriage, and sati. The *Ain* records his positive disapproval of the practice of sati, which was actually stopped in several known instances. Aurangzeb is said to have reinforced the orders of his predecessors, asking officials not to allow 'a woman to be burnt'. The women of the *zenana* in Delhi during the early eighteenth century enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy, with a considerable degree of control over their time. However, the spaces they created for themselves were created within the general framework of patriarchy: its limits could be transgressed only at peril. Religious and secular fairs were thronged by women as well as by men. Documentary evidence from a Punjab town clearly shows that women entered into legal transactions as vendors and mortgagors of immovable property inherited by them. Among them were both Muslim and Hindu widows, owning agricultural land, residential property (*havelis*), and shops. There were women elsewhere who directly participated in the productive processes in rural and urban areas to help the family or even to receive wages. To what extent they were independent of men in their professions is not clear. Like men, women of the labouring classes were turning to devotional movements in search of spiritual fulfilment and freedom from social constraints.

Devotional movements in medieval India are generally believed to have been egalitarian and humanistic in import, with important implications for gender relations. Kabir's attitude towards women was ambivalent. Dadu was more emphatic than Kabir about the path of liberation being open to women. In Gaudiya Vaishnavism, Chaitanya was believed to be the agency of deliverance for all mankind from evil, especially women, Shudras, and sinners. Women are known to have acted as gurus in Gaudiya Vaishnavism, and with the passage of time, the traditional subordination of women to men seems to have been established among its devotees as in the rest of the Bengali society. Guru Nanak's path was open to women and no expression can be construed as implying any kind of gender inequality. However, the patriarchal family was taken for granted, with all its implications for women. In the south there were women saints among both Vaishnavas and Shaivas. They claimed equality with men but had a strong tendency to perceive themselves as brides of the lord. Thus, they rejected patriarchy at the empirical level, but used the patriarchal mode of expression at the metaphysical level. Even the extremely powerful voices of the Virashaiva women saints were effectively integrated by patriarchal forces with the traditional structures. The Varkari movement in Maharashtra provided scope of self-expression for women, and some of the women saints were outcastes and Shudras. However, the sacred spaces that women occupied were conceded to them by men. The Brahmanical revival in Maharashtra during the eighteenth century reinforced patriarchy. On the whole, thus, spirituality was made much more accessible to women than before, and they became more vocal and more visible. However, the framework of patriarchy was too strongly in place to allow much space to women outside the home and the sacred spaces.

Gender relations in medieval India present an interesting comparison with medieval Europe. In theory, man was the head of the family in Europe and managed matters for the women. Women could choose between married life and the life of a consecrated virgin and since the virgin was high above the married woman in holiness and virtue, marriage was a poor second to a life of chastity. Married women were not allowed to inherit or

bequeath and a woman was her husband's property, like his horses. A number of prohibitions clustered around menstrual blood. Copulation was surrounded by guilt and the wife was regarded as sinful if she willingly consented. Physical mistreatment of women was not uncommon. There was a popular belief in the innate inferiority of women and their weakness and women were generally excluded from public life. A growing number of women defied the law of the Church, which forbade women to teach men, and began to preach and to assume priestly functions. Some of them had to die at the stake for this. Women were also beginning to work and earn independently of men. There are many similarities in gender relations in medieval India and medieval Europe. The emancipatory vision appropriated by women in India was centred essentially on spirituality and freedom from the constraints of caste; in Europe it was embedded in productive work as well as spirituality. Revolutionary women were canonized as saints and accommodated in a more or less traditional framework, both in India and Europe.

Professor Kumkum Sangari poses the question of why Akbar is the only king to figure in a wide range of hagiological literature: in the *Tazkira-i Pir Hassu Teli*, Nabhadas's *Bhaktmal* (in relation to Mirabai), Jan Gopal's *Dadu Janam Lila*, Mahapati's *Bhaktavijaya* (in relation to Surdas Madanmohan and Tulsidas), and Hariray's *Chaurasi Vaishnavan ki Varta* (in relation to Surdas). In these narratives Akbar is at once a prototypical king, the object of the archetypal, even quasi-allegorical encounter or contest between worldly power and a holy person. He enters hagiography as a historical figure set off from the stereotype of the unnamed bad Muslim king. He never becomes a zealot or religious persecutor. He is the formulaic object of encounter with an authority whose rewards are generally rejected, and the object of a sought conversion that may or may not have been gained. Symbolic victory over him is accompanied by his patronage, involving a relationship of dependence. The narratives are not autonomous constructions of a popular *mentalité*, bearing no relation to the courtly projection of Akbar. Nor are they permeated by or incorporated into dominant models; they enter into a play of contradictions.

Many encounters of Akbar with contemporary individuals are recorded as historical, as with Sufis and Gosain Jadrup. In these variegated encounters Akbar is an arbiter of succession disputes, but not of holiness; there are no miracles. In hagiographical narratives some of the prominent features are miracles and conversion. As displays of power, miracles are meant to convert. At a formal level 'conversion' of the king is part of a semantic of conquest of worldly pleasure, a system of subduing worldly authority to spiritual authority, be it Sufi or Vaishnava. Professor Sangari explains the possible axes along which Akbar could become a system of symbolic attributions: re-narrativization of events, the orbits of charity, an eclectic court, legitimation from below, synchronic 'non-family' or elective communities of saints, Akbar's own contradictory personal location, the links between royal self-projection and hagiographic notation, and the difficulty of classifying Akbar's beliefs.

Akbar was the object not only of a series of failed classifications, but also of partly successful or failed conversions, as in the accounts of the Parsis, Jains, and Jesuits. His unclassifiability was a source of palpable discomfort for Jesuit missionaries. However, two Vaishnava hagiologies resolved this difficulty through multifaceted gestures of inclusion and exclusion, carrying the implication of 'partial' conversion. Professor Sangari points out that conversion in pre-colonial India was embedded in a variety of social relations as a continuous feature of the history of the subcontinent. There was no dearth of proselytizers: Buddhist, Jain, Roman Catholic, Sunni, Shaiva, Vaishnava, Shakta, Sufi, and Bhakti. Conversion could be sudden, but it could also be a long drawn out process.

In no case was it a thoroughgoing transformation. Therefore, a working notion of 'partial' conversion has the advantage of encapsulating the known processes in more nuanced analyses.

The logic of 'partial' conversion could configure one's own religion as mobile, changing, as something that could be adopted by others in a segmental way. One person's full truth could be another person's partial truth. Akbar was a player in this wider, diffuse drama of hagiography. Little that he did was new, but the familiar phenomena came into a unique combination with a new centralized empire ruled by a king with personal authority, a king who, as gift-giver, benevolent paternal figure, devotee, and preceptor, personalized this centralized empire; his court, a sanctuary for heterodox exiles, institutionalized the patronage of holy men; he assisted or left unchallenged a series of attributions to him of positions of assimilation, doubt, and unclassifiability. He was never represented as without any faith in divinity. Akbar was thus a conjunctural phenomena that could be pulled into hagiographic discourse from a number of directions. The wide dispersal and proliferation of claims on him was unprecedented. The popular conversions of Akbar attest to a process of mutual legitimation of high and low. If the state was seeking legitimation in new structures and a composite ruling class, new groups seem to have acquired a stake in the state. Social history must take into account the oral traditions from which hagiographies crystallized as eloquent articulation of consensualities about which written historical records are silent.

PART 1

CHAPTER 1

The Delhi Sultanate

Irfan Habib

The Delhi sultanate is held conventionally to date from 1206, though its first sultan, Quṭbuddīn Aibak (1206–10), ruled rather paradoxically from Lahore. It originated as a splinter of the empire of Ghor, which broke up after the death of Múizzuddin (Shihābuddīn) whose capital was, in fact, not Ghor, but Ghazni. The kingdom of Ghor had as its core the upper valley of the Harirud, but it had expanded in the south into the upper Helmand basin. Its ruling class came initially from the warrior clans (*pahalwans*) of Ghor. As it expanded southwards, a significant part of its army began to be drawn from the Khalj, a people who, like the Ghorians, spoke an Iranian dialect, and in the thirteenth century, despite their reputed Turkish origins, were held to be distinct from the Turkish-speaking people. The Ghorian successes against the Ghaznavids, notably the occupation of Ghazni in 1173 and then the attacks on their Indian territories as well as local powers were largely the work of Ghorian and Khalj troops.

At Ghazni Shihabuddin first ruled in the name of his elder brother Ghiyasuddin. It seems that here he began to form a special corps of Turkish slaves, and after the second battle of Tarain in 1192, in which Prithvirāj, the Chahamana ruler of Ajmer and Delhi, was overthrown, he began increasingly to place his Turkish slaves in command over most territories. In India at least the Ghorian nobles now lost their prominent position. It is possible that in transferring some of them back to Afghanistan, Shihabuddin was insisting on his right to assign the *iqtas*, or territorial charges, to whomsoever he wished. He was either copying from some surviving Ghaznavid institutions or from the polity of the Saljuq empire, which Ghor had to submit to as late as 1152.¹

Shihabuddin thus became the master of Ghazni and all the Indian conquests, unhindered by any claims of the Ghorian nobility to a share in the dominions. Typically, Bakhtyar Khalji, the conqueror of Bihar and Bengal, had been unable in his early career to enrol himself in the army either at Ghazni or Delhi. In Ghazni and India (except Bengal) the Turkish slave officers were the unchallenged masters when in 1206 Shihabuddin met his death at an assassin's hands. The Ghorian nobles were put to the sword near Ghazni, and two slaves of Shihābuddīn, Yilduz at Ghazni and Quṭbuddīn Aibak at Lahore, divided his

dominions between them, leaving the Ghor kingdom alone to the Ghorian princes and nobles.

Iltutmish (1210–36), a Turkish slave of Qutbuddīn Aibak, rallied his fellow slaves to establish himself at Delhi after a local massacre of Shihabuddin's slaves. Doubtless shaken by the arrival of the Mongol conqueror Chingiz Khan on the Indus river in 1221, an event that politically isolated the sultanate, Iltutmish was relieved by Chingiz's decision not to invade India. He used the remaining period of his life to bring under his control all the areas in India that had once acknowledged the authority of Ghor, from Bengal to Sind. He bolstered his personal authority by building a corps of his own slaves (*mulūk-i shamsī*), consisting mainly of Turks, but he balanced them by appointing free immigrant princes and nobles from Central Asia and Afghanistan to high offices. The latter were mainly Tazik or Tajik, the name then used for Persian-speaking peoples. He assigned much of the sultanate in *iqtas*, or large territorial charges, held by walis or muqtis (governors). They collected tax, tribute, and booty to maintain troops on their own, and sent the surplus (*fawazil*) to the court. Around Delhi and the Doab were extensive territories of the crown, or *khālīṣāt*. The king's own army, the *hashm-i qalb* ('army of the centre') was maintained by assignment of villages as miniature *iqtas* to individual soldiers.²

Iltutmish's reign saw Delhi emerge as a major cultural and economic centre. Much income flowed to Delhi, and the town expanded as both immigrants and local craftsmen and merchants gravitated to Delhi. Slaves gathered by the thousands by various expeditions sent into regions around also contributed to its expanding population. Iltutmish established what became the standard currency of the sultanate, based on gold and silver *tankas*, with fractional coins of copper. The currency not only indicated the financial strength of the regime, but also an expansion of trade: gold and silver coins could be taken to be a response to the requirements of large transactions.

After Iltutmish's death in 1236, during a period of thirty years that followed, five rulers of his dynasty, including the famous woman Sultan Rāziya (1236–40) and the reputedly devout Nāṣiruddīn Maḥmūd (1246–66), failed in their attempt to retain some amount of power in their hands and met violent ends. A group of Turkish slaves of Iltutmish, said by the later historian Baranī to number 'forty', eliminated in successive coups the free-born Tāzīk nobility and acquired full dominance over the sultanate.³ They were, however, themselves riven with personal and factional jealousies, and a remarkable feature, noted by Moreland,⁴ was the inability of individual governors to establish themselves permanently in their *iqtas*, since the latter went on changing hands as the power of the individual nobles grew or shrank.

In 1266 Balban, the leading Turkish slave-noble, deposed Iltutmish's dynasty to become sultan himself (1266–87). He adopted the trappings of the old Iranian monarchy to bolster his dignity. Baranī attributes to him a special theory of the lofty position of monarchy and of the need to protect rigorously the hierarchy of birth, which he might or might not have actually held. Baranī reports Balban as confessing that the threat from the Mongols and the possibility of rebellions prevented him from embarking on any conquests. Whether this was by deliberate design, the fact remained that the sultanate under him was confined to its previous limits. Much of the land north-west of Lahore was now under the control of the Mongols.

Internally, Balban's alleged insistence on giving office to men of his own class, that is, Turkish slave officers, was obviously in conflict with his own personal and dynastic interests. He therefore accepted into his service a number of Mongol immigrants (probably coming in with their bands of troops), but also gave promotions to non-Turks, rising from the

bureaucracy and the soldiery. This enabled Nizāmuddīn, the *wazīr* of Balban's successor Kaiqubād (1287–90) to rise to great authority, though only for a short while.

During Balban's reign, the initial contours of the social base on which the sultanate rested become visible. Part of it was provided by the Muslims, comprising immigrants as well as local communities. It must be remembered that Islam had maintained an existence in Sind and in southern Punjab from early in the eighth century, and in the Lahore area from early in the eleventh. Besides Lahore, towns like Multan and Uchch in the Punjab, and Bhakkar and Siwistan (Sehwan) in Sind already had Muslim populations, the educated being familiar with Persian. Such populations constituted a pool from which petty officials could be drawn. The thirteenth century saw a number of towns (besides Delhi) in the Gangetic basin become centres of Muslim populations, such as Badaun, Kara, Awadh (Ayodhya), and Lakhnauti. Balban is said to have estimated that each region required for its maintenance officials, soldiery, and their dependents some 100,000 persons, who, to judge from the context, were expected to be mainly Muslims.⁵

Yet Baranī himself quoted Nizām al Mulk Junaidī, the *wazīr* of Iltutmish, as saying that Muslims in India were only like salt in one's food in terms of numbers.⁶ It was essential that the sultanate should have support from segments of non-Muslim classes. When a governor of Bengal, Kishlū Khān, declared himself sultan in 1242, there is said to have been indignation among all those who counted, 'Muslims and Hindus'.⁷ This statement by the contemporary historian and theologian Minhāj Sirāj shows how quickly certain local elements outside the Muslim community had come to have a stake in the sultanate.

One section was undoubtedly formed by the *rānakas* (chiefs) and *rāuts* (sub-chiefs, Rajput cavalymen), who had submitted on tributary terms. One can see the sultanate as gradually extending into the countryside by subjugating and absorbing the Hindu chiefs and their retainers. There is epigraphic evidence that after subjugation and levy of tribute such chiefs exercised their rights and authority over the local population very much as before. When the Balbanid prince Malik Chhajjū rebelled in Awadh against Sultan Jalāluddīn Khaljī (1290–96) 'the Hindustani *rāwats* and *pāyaks* (*nāyaks*?) collected around him like ants and locusts'.⁸ Clearly, they had now become militarily a significant force within the sultanate.

A second important class was that of Hindu merchants and bankers. These were often designated 'Multānīs', and presumably comprised merchants from the region around the city of Multan. The famous Sanskrit inscription of Palam Baoli of 1276, extolling Balban, was set up by a rich 'householder', presumably a merchant, whose father had belonged to Uchch, an important town near Multan.⁹ The Multānīs prospered under Balban not only by trade, but also by making advances to the *muqtis* or holders of revenue charges, and getting drafts from them upon the revenues of their *iqtas*.¹⁰

Writing nearly seventy years after Balban's death, Baranī seems nostalgic about the sultanate under that sovereign. There was stability and respect for hierarchy. But one can see that there were already considerable tensions within the structure of the sultanate that go to explain the 'Khaljī revolution' of 1290. The ruling class comprised a small Turkish ruling caste, while the army and bureaucracy were heavily non-Turk in composition. Persian, not Turkish, was the language of the court and upper administration. (Turk linguistic influence was confined apparently to titles like Ulugh Khān and Alp Khān). The territorial stagnation of the sultanate represented a weakness of the regime that could not trust the loyalty of the persons on whom the possession of each acquired region would have to depend.¹¹ Internally, the yet extensive *marwās*, or unsubdued areas, indicated that the area from which revenue and tribute were derived was still mainly confined to the environs of the iqta headquarters that were probably often little better than military camps.¹²

The overthrow of the Turks that the Khalji revolution appeared to signify to contemporaries¹³ inaugurated a new sixty-year phase in the sultanate, where new elements, 'the low-born', 'the upstarts', in Barani's condemnations, forced their way into the ruling class, continuously supplanting the older families. At the same time, the sultanate saw a dramatic phase of expansion and internal suppression of all local rival authorities. The change in the composition of the ruling class and the sudden seeming accession of strength to the sultanate were probably not unconnected.

This strength was shown in the spurt of expansion that began within the reign of Jalāluddīn Khaljī itself (1290–96) and lasted till the early years of Muḥammad Tughluq's reign (1325–51), the most notable successes being achieved under 'Alāuddīn Khaljī (1296–1316). In northern India, Gujarat was annexed in 1299; Ranthambhor in 1301; Chittor in 1303; and Malwa in 1305. The penetration of the Deccan, already inaugurated by 'Alāuddīn's successful raid on Devagiri in 1296, now proceeded in right earnest, with the firm conversion of Devagiri into a client state after another expedition in 1308. Two spectacular campaigns by 'Alāuddīn Khaljī's general Malik Kāfūr brought about the subjugation of Warangal (1309–10) and Dwārasamudra (1310–11). Qutbuddīn Mubārak Khaljī (1316–20) annexed Devagiri and his general Khusrau Khān followed in Malik Kāfūr's footsteps, penetrating like him upto the Pandya kingdom of south India. Under Ghiyāsuddīn Tughluq (1320–25) Warangal was annexed and the sultan himself put an end to the independent regime of the Balban dynasty in Bengal. His son Muḥammad Tughluq (1325–51) in his early years consolidated the control of Delhi over the whole of the Deccan peninsula. In fact, control over the peninsula became so important to him that he for some time had the capital transferred to Devagiri, now renamed Daulatābād.

The Delhi sultanate simultaneously withstood the Mongol invasions, which, directed from the Chaghatay 'horde' of Central Asia, were especially numerous and determined during the reign of 'Alāuddīn Khaljī. What was perhaps the last of these unsuccessful raids took place under the Chagatay ruler Tarmāshīrīn in 1326.¹⁴

The external expansion was matched by an internal deepening of authority. 'Alāuddīn Khaljī was able to impose land revenue accounting for half the produce over an area extending from the Ravi to the Ghaghara. He also reduced heavily the perquisites of the local hereditary chiefs, now designated as chaudhuris, and village headmen, the khots (successors respectively to rānakas and rāutas), though some concessions to these classes were later made by Ghiyāsuddīn Tughluq. The enhanced scale of agrarian exploitation enabled 'Alāuddīn Khaljī to have more grain and other rural produce brought to Delhi at low prices; and this in turn made possible his famous price regulations enforced in the capital and its vicinity. These measures necessarily had a major redistributive effect. While the older rural aristocracy found itself greatly depressed in its position, the sultan himself, his nobles, and the merchants came to be the principal beneficiaries of the measures.¹⁵ The effort to extend the area of intensive revenue collection thus acquired its own momentum. Early in his reign Muḥammad Tughluq is said to have succeeded in imposing all over the empire an administrative regime as rigorous as had been previously established in the region around the capital.¹⁶

Just as the fiscal administration became more rigorous, the sultan's control over the iqtas or territorial assignments of the nobles also became more effective. The wālīs or muqtis were now not only controlled by being continuously transferred, as was already the case before 1290, but there were constant enquiries by the royal government to establish better the income-yielding capacity of the iqtas, and to intervene in how taxes were collected. By Ghiyāsuddīn Tughluq's reign a division of the territory of each iqta into two parts had

become well established: one, with its income reserved for the troops that the muqti was to maintain, and the other part reserved for the personal salary of the muqti himself. Any surplus income was to be sent to the sultan's treasury, and much dispute could arise about the fixation of this figure. Ghiyāsuddīn Tughluq sought to moderate the pressure upon the muqtis somewhat, but Muhammad Tughluq seems to have taken the ultimate step of separating the office of the wali (=muqti), who became a mere tax farmer for the area, and the *amīr* or commander, who maintained troops within the area, and drew his pay and that of his contingent from the wali's treasury. This must necessarily have led to a great curtailment of the power of the military commanders.¹⁷

There were elements in the new power of the sovereign that further narrowed the domain of the *sharia* (Muslim law) and custom wherever these came into conflict with temporal power. 'Alāuddīn Khaljī would inflict on opponents, real or suspected, cruelties 'not perpetrated under any religion or faith'.¹⁸ The reverse of the coin was that Hindus could begin to be appointed to high offices. Illustrative of this trend was the high office given to Malik Nayak (or Manak) who at the head of 30,000 troops, routed a large Mongol army at the end of 1305.¹⁹ The number of Hindus in the sultan's service would grow especially large in the reign of Muhammad Tughluq. Many Hindu names occur among his high officers; two of them were governors who lost their lives at the hands of rebels.²⁰

To a reader of Baranī's brilliant *Tarikh* it may seem that the opening to Hindus was just one aspect of the way the composition of the ruling class was continuously transformed by the tendency of the sultans, at the height of their power, to destroy the older elements and bring in new ones. He describes how under 'Alāuddīn Khaljī the older nobility was decimated, and within the twenty years of his reign three successive sets of nobles could be distinguished. In the initial years the main offices went to his main confidants in the coup against his uncle Jalaluddin. Then these were replaced by a crop of new nobles, who still belonged to the more respectable classes. But towards the end of his reign came total upstarts—'worthless persons, clerks, low-born revenue officers and silly slaves'.²¹ The compulsions for despotism to explore lower and lower strata for its instruments became particularly marked in the reign of Muhammad Tughluq. The 'low-born' nobles of this sultan that Baranī lists by name include wine distillers, a slave 'who shamed all slaves by his appearance and nature', barber, cook, gardener, weaver, vegetable cultivator ('the lowest and basest caste of all the mean and low-born of India'), and a market-man ('the basest of the base-born').²²

There was also the tendency to bring in foreigners, who could be expected to be especially dependent on the sultan. The Mongols (including Turks serving them) were a natural source of recruitment for the army. This generated tension between them and the native elements in the nobility, which the Moorish traveller Ibn Battuta duly noticed.²³

One class that particularly benefited from the sultanate in its period of glory was that of the merchants. Apart from the nobles and bureaucrats, 'the Multanis and the *sahs*' were the only people Sultan Alauddin permitted to amass wealth.²⁴ We have already seen that the term 'Multani' was especially used for Hindu merchants who were supposed originally to have belonged to the city of Multan. The *sahs* were rich Hindu bankers and merchants.²⁵ 'Alāuddīn Khaljī's price regulations did not by any means injure their interests, but, in fact, insofar as they were given loans and encouragement to bring in supplies, the measure must have helped to enlarge their operations.²⁶ Their position seems to have become politically so well established that when Fīroz Tughluq approached Delhi in 1351 in order to claim the throne, it was considered important that 'marketmen, merchants, principal men, *sahs*, *ṣarrāfs* [moneylenders/bankers]' together with Brahmans, arrived from Delhi to welcome him.²⁷ They duly made profits of 'lakhs and crores' under that sovereign.²⁸

A major result of the sultanate's new growth was the expansion of towns, a phenomenon so striking that Professor Mohammad Habib described it as an 'urban revolution'. Delhi became one of the largest cities of the world, and Ibn Battūta, who makes this statement, says Daulatabad was as big a city as Delhi.²⁹

Having reached the apex, the structure of the sultanate became subject to severe strains in the reign of Muhammad Tughluq, a brilliant man of large vision and harsh nature. The continuous effort to increase revenue brought about a large-scale peasant rebellion in the Doab (western Uttar Pradesh) in 1332–34.³⁰ Brutal suppression was followed by an imaginative scheme devised by the sultan for the extension and improvement of cultivation through grant of *sondhar* or loans to peasants. But the attempt was undermined by rampant embezzlement.³¹

Conflicts between different elements of the ruling class, especially between the army commanders (*amīrs*) and the bureaucracy, proved a far more serious danger to the sultanate. Revolts by army officers (*amīrān-i šada*) broke out in province after province. Ultimately, by Muhammad Tughluq's death (1351), Bengal, south India, and the Deccan had seceded from the empire to form regional sultanates, besides the Vijayanagar kingdom. Although Fīroz, the new sultan (1351–88), had been a pliant instrument of his cousin, the late sultan, he was now compelled practically to renounce all the major devices of royal despotism of the earlier period. Offices and assignments were to be treated as inheritable.³² Soldiers began to be paid through land assignments (*wajh*) instead of cash.³³ There was also some relaxation in the imposition of taxes, and the village headmen (*khots*) now reputedly enjoyed an air of prosperity.³⁴

The measures, however, increasingly weakened the sultanate. Fīroz now resorted increasingly to religious displays. The *jizya* or poll-tax was imposed on such Hindus as were exempt previously: payers of the land tax and Brahmans.³⁵

The sultan's power had eroded considerably before Fīroz Tughluq closed his eyes in 1388. Interminable struggles for succession did not help matters. The *coup de grâce* was delivered by Timur's massively destructive invasion of 1398. Thereafter Delhi no longer remained the capital of an empire, or even a large kingdom. Its revival as a town was slow and even in the late sixteenth century it appeared to be in a ruinous condition.

Khizr Khan, the ruler of Multan, brought Delhi under his control in 1414, and founded the short-lived Saiyid dynasty whose rule ended in 1451. The succeeding dynasty of the Lodis, who were of Afghan origin, was more successful in expanding the sultanate. The annexation of Jaunpur (1479) took place under Bahlol Lodī (1351–89); Sikandar Lodī (1489–1571) took Narwar, Chanderi, and Nagaur; and Ibrāhīm Lodī (1517–26) annexed Gwalior. Sikandar also shifted the capital to Agra (1515), the future seat of the Mughal empire. In 1526 Ibrahim died fighting Babur, the first Mughal emperor. The sultanate under the Lodis seems to have been organized on the same loose pattern acquired in Fīroz Tughluq's later years. The provinces (the *iqtas* or *wilāyats* of previous times) were now known as *sarkārs* because each of them was deemed a *sarkār* or administrative establishment of the governor. *Wajh* was now the term for the smaller revenue assignments granted mainly to soldiers. Transfers were fairly rare.

The Lodī regime remained fundamentally weak. Its army mainly comprised *sihbandīs* (troops hired for the occasion). The sultan's authority over governors was also lax. It is difficult to read here any particular influence of Afghan tradition in such lack of control, which, in Rushbrook Williams' words, made the Lodi ruler appear essentially as 'a hereditary chieftain'.³⁶ This was probably a legacy only of the great decay that had affected the Delhi sultanate since Fīroz Tughluq's days.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Cf. Nizām al Mulk Tūsī (d. 1091), *Siyāsatnāma* (edited by Ja'far Shu'ār) (Teheran: A.H. (Solar) 1348), p. 44, for a description of the main features of the iqta under the Saljuqs. Cf. Ann K.S. Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia* (London: 1953), pp. 61–7.
- 2 While most of the information in this paragraph is based on Minhāj Sirāj, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāsiri* (edited by 'Abdul Hai Habībī) (2 vols) (Kabul: 1964 [2nd edition]), the information on the hashm-i qalb comes from Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī* (edited by Saiyid Ahmad Khan, W.N. Lees, and Kabir al-Din Ahmad) Bib. Ind., (Calcutta: 1862), pp. 61–4.
- 3 Irfan Habib, *Medieval India—1*, (Delhi: 1992), pp. 15–21. The interpretation there is based on the detailed information in the *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāsiri*. For Baranī's brilliant summing up of the period, in the course of which he speaks of the 'Forty Turkish Slaves' (*Bandagan-i Turk-i Chihalgani*), see his *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī*, pp. 26–8.
- 4 W.H. Moreland, *Agrarian System of Moslem India* (Cambridge: 1929), p. 218.
- 5 Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī*, pp. 51–2.
- 6 Baranī, *Ṣahifa-i Na't-i Muḥammadi*, extract from text in *Medieval India Quarterly*, vol. I, nos. 3–4, p. 105, (translation and comment by S. Nurul Hasan, *ibid.*, pp. 101–3).
- 7 Minhāj, *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāsiri* (Part II), p. 32.
- 8 Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī*, p. 182. *Payak* means a foot-soldier, *nāyak* a captain: in Persian writing, with dots indifferently put, it is impossible to be sure which of the two terms was intended by Baranī. Cf. Pushpa Prasad, *Sanskrit Inscriptions of Delhi Sultanate* (Delhi: 1990), p. xxiii.
- 9 Prasad, *ibid.*, pp. 3–15, for text, translation, and commentary.
- 10 Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī*, p. 120.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 51–2.
- 12 For *mawās* territories, see Irfan Habib and Faiz Habib, 'Political Map of Northern India, First Half of the Thirteenth Century', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, LVIII Session, Bangalore, 1997, p. 213. Balban had to lead ferocious raids into the extensive *mawās* territories around Delhi. Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī*, pp. 55–9.
- 13 'Iṣāmī, *Futūh us-Salāṭin* (edited by A.S. Usha) (Madras: 1948), p. 20b; Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī*, p. 173.
- 14 On both the conquests and the Mongol raids, the two major narratives are those of Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī*, and Isamī, *Futūh us-Salāṭin*. Both are deficient in dates. Amīr Khusrāu describes Malik Kafur's two principal campaigns in *Khazāin ul-Futūh* (edited by Muhammad Wahid Mirza) Bib. Ind., (Calcutta: 1953), and Khusrāu Khan's expedition in *Nuh Sipihr* (edited by Muhammad Wahid Mirza) (London: 1950). The entire evidence is examined afresh in Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (Cambridge: 1999). He is especially strong on the Mongol regimes and their relations with the sultanate.
- 15 Our principal authority for these measures is Baranī, but he can be supplemented by other sources. Irfan Habib, 'Agrarian Economy', in T. Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (eds), *Cambridge Economic History of India* (vol. I) Cambridge, 1982, pp. 53–68; and 'Price Regulations of 'Ala'uddin Khalji—A Defence of Ziya Baranī', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. XXI, 1984, pp. 393–414, where full references to Baranī and other authorities will be found.
- 16 Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī*, pp. 468–9.
- 17 The evidence on which this paragraph is based is studied in detail in Irfan Habib, 'Agrarian Economy', pp. 68–73.
- 18 Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī*, p. 253.
- 19 Amir Khusrāu, *Khazāin ul-Futūh*, pp. 37–41.
- 20 Of these two one was Ratan, governor of Sind with Siwistan (Sehwan) as his capital (*The Travels of Ibn Battuta* [vol. III] translated by H.A.R. Gibb) [London: 1958], p. 599; the other was Bharan, the governor of Gulbarga and Kobar in the Deccan ('Iṣāmī, *Futūh us-Salāṭin*, pp. 485–7). For a list of low-class officials that also includes some Hindus of lower classes promoted by Muhammad Tughluq, see Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī*, p. 505.
- 21 Baranī, *ibid.*, p. 337.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 505. All are named, and at least two of these, 'Azīz Khummār and Muqbil, are otherwise known to have held offices of trust.
- 23 *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, pp. 721–2.
- 24 Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī*, p. 284.
- 25 Habib, *Cambridge Economic History of India*, pp. 85–6.

- 26 On loans given by 'Alāuddīn Khaljī to Multānīs and merchants, see Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī*, p. 311; Sham Sirāj 'Afīf, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī* (edited by Wilayat Husain) Bib. Ind., (Calcutta, 1862), p. 293. Shaikh Naṣīruddīn, in the conversations (c. 1354) reported by Ḥamīd Qalandar in *Khair ul-Majālis* (edited by K.A. Nizami) (Aligarh: 1954), p. 241, says the grain transporters (*nāyaks*, the *kārvānīs* of Baranī, and *banjāras* of later sources) were also assisted with money given or advanced by Sultan 'Alāuddīn.
- 27 Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī*, p. 546.
- 28 Ibid., p. 554 (*sipāhān* is a misprint here for *sāhān*, plural of *sah*).
- 29 Cf. Irfan Habib, *Economic History of Medieval India—A Survey*, (New Delhi: 2000), p. 3.
- 30 'Such peasants as were weak and without resources were completely made prostrate [by taxation], and the rich peasants who had resources and means, turned rebels'. Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī*, p. 472.
- 31 Ibid., pp. 498–9.
- 32 Fīroz Tughluq's own proclamation, *Futūhāt-i Fīrozshāhī* (edited by S.A. Rashid) (Aligarh: 1954), p. 18. Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī*, pp. 549–52, 555; 'Afīf, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī*, pp. 474–5, 482.
- 33 Baranī, *ibid.*, p. 553; 'Afīf, *ibid.*, pp. 94–6, 193–4, 220–21.
- 34 Baranī, *op. cit.*, p. 554. 'Afīf attributes the prosperity to peasants in general and describes in most improbable details the possessions they now had (*op. cit.*, pp. 99–100). On the abolition of certain taxes, Baranī, *ibid.*, p. 174; Fīrozshāh, *Futūhat-i Fīrozshāhī*, p. 5; 'Afīf, *op. cit.*, pp. 575–9.
- 35 'Afīf, *op. cit.*, pp. 382–4; 'Ainul Mulk Māhrū, *Inshā-i Māhrū* (edited by S.A. Rashid and M. Bashir Husain) (Lahore: 1965), pp. 61–3.
- 36 L.F. Rushbrook Williams, *An Empire Builder of the Sixteenth Century* (Delhi: no date [reprint]), p. 16.

CHAPTER 2

The Sultanate of Gujarat

Iqtidar Alam Khan

At the time of its establishment in 1407, the sultanate of Gujarat, rested mainly on the support of the nobles of the Tughluq empire serving in the region. After the collapse of the central authority in the Tughluq empire following Timur's invasion (1398), the nobles stationed in Gujarat favoured the establishment of an independent sultanate in the region. But Zafar Khan, governor (designated as wazir) of Gujarat, was reluctant to declare his independence. Taking advantage of this situation, his son Tatar Khan declared himself the sovereign ruler of Gujarat in 1406, but the attempt proved abortive as he failed to mobilize sufficient number of nobles in his support. Eventually, in 1407, agreeing to the request of the nobles serving under him in the province, Zafar Khan assumed sovereign status with the royal title of Muzaffar Shah.¹

On the eastern side, the sultanate of Gujarat was skirted by the Malwa plateau and a short run of the Satpura range from Nandurbar to the Tapti along the territory of Khandesh. To the south of the Tapti it enclosed the semi-tribal tract of Baglana. In the north, its territory was demarcated by the southern confines of the Rajput principalities of Marwar and Mewar. In the west its boundary lay 'somewhere on the Gulf of Cutch or perhaps a little east of this'. Gujarat's inland boundaries were flexible and are not easy to define. Its heartland under the sultans was essentially represented by the territory of ten sarkars, which came to form suba Ahmedabad under Akbar. This territory also served as the immediate hinterland of a large number of ports dotting the coast of the Gulf of Cambay and to a lesser extent the coast of the Arabian Sea in Kathiawar. More prominent among them were Baroch, Cambay, Daman, Surat, Div, Porbandar, and Jagat.²

The nobles participating in the setting up of the sultanate of Gujarat included a large number of Afghans who appear to have settled in Gujarat during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughluq. According to S.C. Misra, the Afghan elements who had rebelled against Muhammad bin Tughluq towards the end of his reign were treated mildly by Firoz Tughluq, which made them 'unusually loyal to him'. They thus came to represent an overwhelmingly large number of the 'second tier of landholders planted in Gujarat by the northern rulers'.³ Among the Muslim warrior communities forming the support base of the newly-

established sultanate, the neo-Muslim warrior clans were also prominent. The presence of a large number of nobles identified as Barwaris, a neo-Muslim Rajput clan of Gujarat, in the nobility of Mubarak Khalji (1315–20) is noticed by Barani. Many of them appear to have continued to serve in Gujarat even after the overthrow of Khusrau Khan who had captured power at Delhi for a short while in 1320 with their help. The founder of the sultanate of Gujarat, Zafar Khan, himself was a convert to Islam from a sect of Khatri known as Tanks. A large number of his relations and clansmen were serving under him in Gujarat prior to when he captured power.⁴

A vast majority of the nobles of the sultanate of Gujarat were apparently recruited from these two categories. That the nobility of Gujarat at the time of its formation was largely formed by these categories is borne by the available information on the antecedents of the individuals who served as nobles under the sultans during 1407–1535. Out of the 280 nobles who served during this entire period, 209 can be identified as 'Gujaratis', that is, local converts as well as Afghans and other outsiders settled in Gujarat since the beginning of the fourteenth century. Among the nobles of Gujarati origin, Muslims (including slaves) number 190 as against nineteen Rajputs and other Hindus. This break-up indicates that among the nobles of the Gujarat sultanate, the local Muslims were the single largest component. The strength of non-Gujaratis in the nobility became considerable only after the induction of a large number of Abyssinians and many Ottomans, Arabs, and Persians in the first quarter of the sixteenth century. From this it is evident that in 1407 the preponderance of the local elements in the nobility would have been still more marked.⁵

It may be assumed that, to begin with, the nobles were organized to form this new sultanate in accordance with the norms and practices familiar under the Tughluqs. These, on the one hand, defined the position of nobles as the slaves of the sultan and, on the other, tended to make the assignments and posts held by them practically hereditary.⁶ The rulers of Gujarat found it difficult to control their nobility within this institutional framework.

From its very inception, the sultanate of Gujarat was confronted with the task of controlling the hereditary chiefs⁷ who had become quite strong and assertive during Firoz Shah Tughluq's reign. For effectively controlling the hereditary chiefs, the sultans were called upon to establish a strong centralized administration supported by a disciplined nobility. But from the very beginning such measures were stoutly resisted by the nobles who perceived themselves as the co-founders of the new sultanate and tended to act as the kingmakers. They were not prepared to submit to a regimen of strict discipline sought to be imposed by the sultans through periodic rotation of assignments and also by promoting to high positions meritorious men from among their own slaves and personal attendants. Repeated revolts of the nobles during the first half of the fifteenth century were an indication of this structural dichotomy affecting the sultanate from its very beginning.

The first revolt took place after Muzaffar Shah's death in 1411 when his grandson Ahmad Shah, who had the reputation of being a very ruthless but competent person, ascended the throne. He was carefully trained by Muzaffar Shah for succession, setting aside the claims of his sons, two of whom, Mu'id-al-Din Firoz Khan and Shaikh Malik Masti Khan, were the commandants of Baroda and Surat respectively. Firoz Khan refused to submit to the new sultan. He was soon joined by three other sons of Muzaffar Shah, namely, Shaikh Malik Haibat Khan, Sa'adat Khan, and Sher Khan, and by a large number of nobles, some of whom, according to Nizam-al-Din Ahmad, were well known for their 'innate wickedness (*shararat-i zati*)'. These included Amir Muhammad Barki, Husam ul-Mulk Bhandari, Malik Ahmad Bhandari, Malik Shah Khatri, Malik Karim Khusrau, Jiwand Khatri, and

Baikdas. This list recorded by Sikandar bin Manjhu suggests that most of them belonged to Gujarat itself and included a few non-Muslims as well. Significantly, the names of Afghan nobles are missing from this list, but some of them are mentioned on the side of the sultan in the ensuing struggle. It would suggest that on this occasion the nobility that had helped Muzaffar Shah in the establishment of a new sultanate was split into two factions. While the Afghans and other outsiders planted in Gujarat during Firoz Tughluq's reign sided with the sultan, a majority of Gujarati neo-Muslims supported by two of their non-Muslim compatriots chose to oppose the new sultan as they apprehended that he planned to deprive them of the lucrative territorial assignments they were holding under Muzaffar Shah.⁸

This revolt spread in a short span of time over a large tract extending from Baroda and Patan to the coastal districts of Cambay, Baroch, and Surat. Sultan Ahmad Shah, on his part, appears to have faced this challenge to his authority with tact and firmness. He succeeded in neutralizing his uncles, including Firoz Khan (*hakim* of Baroda) and Shaikh Malik Masti Khan (*hakim* of Surat) without much difficulty. But the nobles who had joined them proved more stubborn. They continued their struggle against the sultan under the leadership of Jiwand Khatri for some more time. Eventually, Sultan Ahmad Shah succeeded in creating a rift in their ranks. A majority turned against their leader who was, apparently, totally opposed to a negotiated settlement with the sultan. As it became evident that the sultan was gaining an upper hand in the ongoing struggle, the nobles killed Jiwand Khatri and surrendered to the sultan.

There was another attempt at rebellion in 1412 in which the Afghan nobles, Ahmad Sher Malik and Azam Khan, the assignment holders (*tarafdaran*) of Patan were involved. They had entered into a secret understanding with Sultan Hoshang of Malwa and the chief of Jhalawar to overthrow Ahmad Shah. But Ahmad Shah promptly besieged the rebels in the fort of Morarsa (Morda) and captured it in a general assault. He also sent a large army against Hoshang Shah to nip in the bud an attempt at renewing the revolt.⁹

Subsequently, for about twenty-eight years (1412–40), Sultan Ahmad Shah was busy in suppressing the local chiefs of the regions adjacent to Mewar, Malwa, and Khandesh. His successes against the local chiefs cannot but be linked to the discipline imposed by him on the nobility in the beginning of his reign. During the last two years of his reign, he further consolidated his authority by introducing a regulation providing for the disbursement of half the salary of a trooper in cash from state treasury; the other half was to be assigned against land yielding a specified revenue included in the *iqta* of his immediate employer.¹⁰ This arrangement was obviously aimed at weakening the bond of personal loyalty between the troopers and the nobles commanding them. The troopers were thus sought to be given an impression that their real employer and benefactor was the sultan himself.

We may not be far wrong in assuming that the emergence of the sultanate of Gujarat as a fairly centralized state in the first half of the fifteenth century was Sultan Ahmad Shah's achievement. After his death in 1442, down to Sultan Daud Shah's accession in 1459, the sultanate remained largely free of any perceivable tension between the nobility and the sultan. But this situation was disturbed once again when Daud Shah was removed from the throne by nobles within seven days of his accession. The reasons for the nobles turning *en masse* against him were two-fold. First, a drastic curtailment of expenditure in the royal establishments, and a scrutiny of the treasury and resumption of some of the grants made as early as Muzaffar Shah's reign (1407–11), were perceived by the nobles as an unprecedented encroachment on their fiscal benefits. Second, the nobility as a whole was outraged by the sultan's decision to raise one of his menial servants to nobility, giving him the

title of Imdad ul-Mulk, which was till then held by one of the influential wazirs. The message conveyed was that the groups who had participated in the founding of the sultanate would no longer be allowed to monopolize the highest positions, which could now be given to any competent person, even an outsider enjoying the confidence of the sultan. This 'message' was evidently viewed by the nobles as a total violation of the terms on which they had submitted to Sultan Ahmad Shah's regimen of strict discipline in 1411-12.

The sultan, whom the nobles brought to the throne after deposing Daud Shah, was the famous Mahmud Begarha (1459-1513). He was as determined to further curb the privileges of the nobility, as was the case with his unfortunate predecessor, but was discreet enough not to make any move that might turn a majority of the serving nobles against him in the very beginning. He was soon able to stabilize his position on the throne by defeating and eliminating the four leading nobles dominating the sultanate till then.¹¹ Mahmud Begarha is also credited with introducing slave-nobles in sizeable strength by raising fifty-two of his personal slaves to the position of nobles in one sweeping order.¹² His one great concession to the nobles was his order making their assignments permanent. But this was counterbalanced in 1473 by the transfer of the assignments of some of the leading nobles who, being unhappy over the sultan's frequent military campaigns, were suspected of planning a rebellion. On this occasion the sultan not only stalled the contemplated rebellion, but also succeeded in imposing on the nobles a new system of military command that gave further fillip to centralization within the sultanate. Under this arrangement the entire territory of the sultanate was divided into four commands and each one of them was entrusted to one of the newly promoted high nobles.¹³ These regional commanders, on the whole, worked loyally to keep the administration under the firm control of the sultan. This system worked efficiently down to Bahadur Shah's time (1526-36). But, under the changed conditions after Bahadur Shah's death, it appears to have contributed to the emergence of semi-independent centres of power headed by individual nobles who competed with each other for controlling the succeeding sultans. It was this state of disintegration that facilitated the annexation of the sultanate of Gujarat to the Mughal empire in 1572-73.

The sultanate of Gujarat from its very inception faced stiff resistance from the hereditary chiefs of the region. The chiefs of Gujarat, particularly the major ones, like those of Junagarh, Jhalawar, Idar, Jagat, and Champanir, located on its outer periphery, appeared to be determined to dismantle the emerging sultanate. In this struggle they not only made attempts to coordinate their moves with each other, but also to seek armed intervention from the rulers of Malwa and Khandesh in their favour. The sultans of Gujarat, on the other hand, always portrayed their struggle for controlling the chiefs as a ceaseless religious war they were supposedly called upon to carry on for defending Islam against infidelity.

It was after a prolonged struggle that a powerful section of the chiefs of Gujarat, including that of Junagarh, were forced in 1417 to agree to pay tribute to the sultan. Three years later the chiefs rebelled *en masse* and also invited Sultan Hoshang of Malwa to intervene. But when Sultan Ahmad Shah succeeded in pushing out Hoshang Shah from Gujarat, the chiefs of Idar, Champanir, and Nadaut made peace with the sultan and agreed to pay tribute to him. This marked the collapse of the first mass uprising of the chiefs.¹⁴ During the second half of the fifteenth century, three big chiefs on the periphery, those of Junagarh, Jagat, and Champanir, were eliminated one by one, and most of their territories were brought under the direct control of the sultan. The last to be annexed was Champanir (1484), where the use of gunpowder artillery by the sultan's forces played a decisive role in reducing the fortifications. The lesser chiefs and intermediaries like those of Sirohi, Idar,

Nadaut, Rajpipla, Jhalawar, and Bhuj, whose territories were situated closer to the heartland of the sultanate around Ahmedabad, were left unmolested. But these were gradually forced to accept conditions of military service in return for *banth*, that is, one-fourth share of their original revenues, while *talpad* or three-fourths of the original revenues, were taken over by the central authority.¹⁵

The consolidation of the sultanate of Gujarat resulting from the disciplining of the nobility and pacification of the hereditary chiefs appears to have increased its military might considerably. This was also facilitated by the favourable position of the sultanate in respect to the supply of warhorses and availability of gunpowder artillery. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, among the regional states located to the east and south of the Lodi empire, the sultanate of Gujarat had a unique position; it received horses from West Asia by sea as well as by land routes. That is why, unlike most of them, the military potential of Gujarat was not affected to any appreciable extent by the restrictions sought to be imposed by the Portuguese on the maritime movement of horses to India from the Persian Gulf and Arabia. If there was any shortfall in the supply of horses to Gujarat because of the Portuguese restrictions, it was perhaps compensated by the supplies coming there by land, which the rulers of Gujarat took special pains to protect.¹⁶

The sultanate of Gujarat enjoyed the advantage of possessing gunpowder artillery from quite an early date during the fifteenth century. By the time Mahmud Begarha besieged Champanir in 1484, he had come to possess an effective artillery. Traditions of Rajput clans of Gujarat compiled by Forbes tend to suggest that some kind of gunpowder artillery was already available in Gujarat as early as the reign of Sultan Ahmad Shah (1411–42). However, these new weapons were so costly that an ordinary hereditary chief could not easily afford them.¹⁷ The great demand for copper that existed in Gujarat during the first decade of the sixteenth century perhaps had something to do with the phenomenal expansion of gunpowder artillery there during Mahmud Begarha's reign (1459–1513).¹⁸

The increased military strength of Gujarat seems to have created a very favourable situation for the extension of its sphere of influence in every direction. A tendency on the part of the sultans of Gujarat to gain control of regions in southern Rajputana, Malwa, and the Deccan was perhaps also prompted by a situation where large quantities of foodgrains were imported from these territories for supporting the large urban population of their realm.¹⁹ Gujarat's forward policy towards Mewar, Malwa, and Khandesh during the first thirty-five years of the sixteenth century²⁰ was apparently an outcome of this situation.

Towards the end of the period that Gujarat was being ruled by an independent sultan, that is, towards 1572, its population may be roughly estimated to range from ten to fifteen million. This estimate is arrived at by applying the army–population ratio (1:20) suggested by Shireen Moosvi's estimates for the strength of the armed forces and of the total population of the Mughal empire (1594) to the sultanate of Gujarat as it stood in 1572. In this calculation, the strength of armed forces for Gujarat is arrived at by adding up the figure of 20,300 given by the author of *Mir'at-i Ahmadi* for the strength of its army in 1572 to that of the retainers of the zamindars (560, 575) given in the *Ain-i Akbari*. Out of this total population, a very large segment was apparently concentrated in the urban belt represented by towns like Patan, Ahmedabad, Cambay, Baroda, Baroch, Rander, Surat, and Navsari, many of which grew as large towns during the time Gujarat was being ruled by the sultans. Shireen Moosvi's estimates reveal that the city of Ahmedabad accounted for the second largest amount of urban tax in the Mughal empire, the largest being that of the imperial capital Agra itself. Again, the number of towns (thirteen) in Gujarat is also the largest after subha Agra. The urban tax in most of these towns appears to have been quite

high.²¹ This in turn is an indication of Gujarat having an unusually large urban population, a pattern dictated by its commercial prosperity since the fifteenth century.

Many of the handicrafts and arts that were reported as being practised in Gujarat in the seventeenth century may be assumed to have originated or perfected during this period.²² A very significant contribution of the sultans of Gujarat in the field of fine arts was the emergence of a new regional style in the Indo-Islamic architecture that was subsequently incorporated by Akbar in the monuments built by him at Fatehpur Sikri and Agra. This style is identified with the oriel windows, perforated stone screens, and the combination of the screen of arches and pillared porticoes in the facades of the mosques. These features could, for example, be seen in the two important monuments of Ahmedabad: Jami Masjid and Tin Darwaza.

Trade and commerce was encouraged by the sultans of Gujarat almost as a matter of policy. The great military potential of Gujarat was perceived to be directly linked with its commercial prosperity. This is brought out by the well-known remark of the second Lodi ruler Sultan Sikandar (1491–1517): 'The pivot of the Kingdom of Delhi rests on wheat and barley, while the foundation of the sultanate of Gujarat rests on corals and pearls, because there are eighty-four ports under its sultans.'²³

It is no doubt true that sea trade in Gujarat was grossly under-taxed.²⁴ But it is not very correct to assume that sea trade was of little value for the Gujarat rulers. Some of the enterprising members of the nobility as well as of the royal family did earn profits by investing in overseas trade. Malik Ayaz was perhaps a typical representative of this category. Moreover, the Gujarat rulers always enjoyed the advantage of being in a position to raise large amounts as loans or contributions from the prosperous business communities specializing in sea trade who were settled in port towns like Cambay, Bharoch, and Div in large numbers. Last, the availability of considerable quantities of silver in Gujarat that came mainly from abroad, as a result of a favourable balance of trade, prevented the debasement of the Gujarati currency to the extent it happened in the landlocked Lodi empire during the fifteenth century.²⁵ In this light, the sea trade, notwithstanding its being under-taxed, could be regarded as an important source of prosperity and military potential of the sultanate of Gujarat.

There existed a large population of traders and merchants in Gujarat. Some of them were of foreign origin. The number of those belonging to non-Gujarati Indian communities like Khattris, Kashmiris, and Marwaris was also not inconsiderable. But a very large number of them belonged to indigenous trading communities amongst whom the Jain Banias were the most conspicuous. The sultans generally had a very protective attitude towards them. In one of his inscriptions at Bhaunagar, Mahmud Begarha is referred to as *hami al-tajjar* (protector of the merchants). According to Sikandar bin Manjhu, the traders felt very secure and contented during his reign as the routes were safe and the incidents of theft and robbery were rare. Mahmud Begarha is reported to have established many *sarais* for the convenience of traders.²⁶

Occasionally, persons belonging to local trading communities, such as Bhandaris, Khattris, and Banias were taken into the nobility of the Gujarat sultanate. Some of the Bhandaris mentioned as the nobles of the sultans of Gujarat carried Muslim names like Hisam ul-Mulk Bhandari, Malik Ahmad Bhandari, Malik Pyara Bhandari, and Chand Bhandari. This, incidentally, might suggest that after they were admitted into the Gujarat nobility, some belonging to the Hindu trading communities had converted to Islam. The merchant nobles of the Gujarat sultanate at times exercised appreciable influence on state policies. The vast wealth possessed by some of them, like Manik Chand, Moti Chand, Khwaja

Safir, and Malik Ayaz, enabled them to gain considerable clout at the court, which was often used by them to influence the sultan's decisions on important policy matters. Some of the Hindu nobles of merchant origin are known to have used their influence sometimes to persuade the sultans to adopt a tolerant attitude in religious matters.²⁷

One may surmise that in terms of the peculiar nature of its power base, and the highly centralized administrative apparatus resting on that base, the sultanate of Gujarat had a unique position among the various regional powers overthrown by the Mughals during the sixteenth century. The sultanate commanded vast financial resources by virtue of its control on the trade passing through the numerous ports located around the Gulf of Cambay and on the Kathiawar coast. This apparently tended to increase the military potential of the sultanate enormously and created a situation where generally the Gujarati sultans had a tendency to extend their sway towards Malwa, Mewar, and the Deccan. But for Babur's arrival in Hindustan in 1526, this situation could possibly have resulted in the emergence of a new type of empire in north-western India where the indigenous Muslim warrior groups would have been in a commanding position from the very beginning.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Sikandar bin Manjhu, *Mir'at-i Sikandari* (Bombay: A.H., 1308), pp. 18–19. Cf. Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate* (Cambridge: 1999), p. 319.
- 2 Cf. M.N. Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat: The Response to the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century* (New Delhi: 1976), p. 19; Irfan Habib, *An Atlas of the Mughal Empire* (Delhi: 1982), sheet 7A.
- 3 Cf. S.C. Misra, *The Rise of Muslim Power in Gujarat: A History of Gujarat from 1298 to 1442* (New Delhi: 1981), pp. 91, 98, 137.
- 4 Cf. Barani, *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi* (edited by Saiyid Ahmad Khan) (Calcutta: 1862), pp. 400–12; Manjhu, *Mir'at-i Sikandari*, pp. 1–4, 18–19.
- 5 Aijaz Bano, 'Socio-Political Conditions of Gujarat During the Fifteenth Century', Ph.D. thesis, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, 1988, pp. 92–111; Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat*, p. 66, n. 20, where the sixteenth-century Portuguese account of Descricao, mentioning the nobles speaking Arabic, Persian, and Gujarati, is cited.
- 6 For the position of the nobles in the Tughluq empire under Firoz Tughluq and the nature of the iqta assignments, see K.M. Ashraf, *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan* (Delhi: 1959 [reprint]), pp. 64–5; Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate*, p. 305; M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb* (Bombay: 1966), p. 63; Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perception* (New Delhi: 1995), pp. 84–5.
- 7 Aijaz Bano, 'The Zamindars in the Sultanate of Gujarat', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, XLV Session (Annamalainagar) (Delhi: 1985), pp. 340–41.
- 8 Manjhu, *Mir'at-i Sikandari*, *op. cit.*, pp. 22–3. Cf. Nizam-al-Din Ahmad, *Tabaqat-i Akbari* (edited by B. De) (vol. III), (Calcutta: 1913), pp. 96–7. Nizam-al-Din Ahmad's statement that the nobles surrendered before the sultan on the condition that they would be given back their old *iqtas* suggests that the revolt was provoked by the attempt of the sultan to transfer the assignments.
- 9 Manjhu, *Mir'at-i Sikandari*, pp. 28–30.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 42–3.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 69–74.
- 12 Ahmad, *Tabaqat-i Akbari* (vol. III), p. 138.
- 13 Under this arrangement, the sultanate was divided into four parts. While three of them were placed under high nobles, namely Imad-ul-Mulk, Farhat ul-Mulk, and Nizam ul-Mulk, the sultan himself administered the *vilayat* of Karnal. Ahmad, *Tabaqat-i Akbari* (vol. III), p. 153; Muhammad Qasim Firishta, *Tarikh-i Firishta*, Nawal Kishore, (Kanpur: 1884), p. 200.
- 14 Cf. Misra, *Rise of Muslim Power in Gujarat*, pp. 170–74, 177; Aijaz Bano, 'The Zamindars in the Sultanate of Gujarat', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, pp. 340–41.
- 15 Bano, *ibid.*, pp. 341–2.
- 16 Cf. Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat*, p. 13. Manjhu, *Mir'at-i Sikandari*, p. 114. It is recorded that

Sultan Mahmud Begarha in 1486–7 compensated a Central Asian horse-trader plundered by the raja of Sirohi near Mount Abu.

- 17 Alexander Kinloch Forbes, *Ras Mala: Hindu Annals of Western India* (New Delhi: 1973 [reprint]), pp. 258–61. The tradition about the refusal of Samut Singh, chief of Beeol, to give his daughter in marriage to Sultan Ahmad Shah illustrates the point. The raja is reported to have equipped himself with artillery ('powder and balls') with the money given to him from the royal treasury for arranging his daughter's marriage with the sultan in a befitting manner. He subsequently used this artillery in his fight against Sultan Ahmad Shah's troops.
- 18 Pearson, *Merchant and Rulers in Gujarat*, p. 69. A Portuguese record says that Malik Ayaz was always pressing the viceroy to send to Div 'ships loaded with copper and spices so that he could trade with us'.
- 19 W.H. Moreland, *India at the Death of Akbar*, (Delhi: 1962 [reprint]), p. 228.
- 20 For the aggressive attitude of the sultanate of Gujarat towards Ahmadnagar, Khandesh, Malwa, and Mewar during the reigns of Sultan Muzaffar and Bahadur Shah, see Manjhu, *Mirat-i Sikandari*, pp. 142–6, 151–3, 216–36.
- 21 Bano, 'Socio-Political Condition of Gujarat', pp. 14–22. Cf. Shireen Moosvi, *The Economy of the Mughal Empire c.1595* (Delhi: 1987), pp. 209–16.
- 22 Manjhu, *Mir'at-i Sikandari*, p. 110. Writing in 1614, Sikandar bin Manjhu observes: 'Most of the subtleties, skills and sciences that are now manifest in Gujarat were invented by the skilful ones of the towns of the realm (i.e. Gujarat) during the time of the great Sultan Mahmud [Begarha].
- 23 Ibid., p. 247.
- 24 Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat*, p. 88.
- 25 Cf. John F. Richards, 'The Economic History of the Lodi Period: 1451–1526', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. VIII, no. 1, 1965, pp. 49–50.
- 26 Manjhu, *Mir'at-i Sikandari*, p. 75.
- 27 *Epigraphia Indica* (vol. II) (1894), p. 35. A Sanskrit inscription dated 1531–2 credits a *mantri* of the sultan for persuading the sultan to permit repair of a Jain temple in the Satrunjaya hills.

CHAPTER 3

The Sultanate of Kashmir

R.L. Hangloo

Founded by Shah Mir in 1339, the sultanate of Kashmir lasted for nearly a century and a half till Kashmir was conquered by Akbar in 1586 and annexed to the Mughal empire. Shah Mir's dynasty was replaced by the Chak dynasty in 1560, a decade after Mirza Haidar Dughlat's rule over Kashmir from 1540 to 1551. The fortunes of the sultanate and its character did not remain exactly the same throughout the period. Therefore, we will look at the sultanate from the early fourteenth to the late sixteenth century in its several phases.

I

Jonaraja refers to King Suhadeva (1301–20), the last native ruler of Kashmir, as a *rākshāsa* because of his cruel and avaricious nature. However, his reign was not markedly different from the reigns of his immediate predecessors. The landed groups in general and the priestly class in particular enjoyed privileged positions. They were free from punishment, taxation, and forced labour. A Brahman's property was not escheated by the state even if he died heirless. The people belonging to the lower strata were extremely poor due to excessive taxation; their poverty was embedded in the ecology of the region. The economy of Kashmir was dependent mainly on agriculture. The amount of cultivable land in the valley was rather limited, and the geophysical conditions of the region restricted agriculture to a single crop. The principal beneficiaries of the socio-economic and political organization in Kashmir, the priestly and the other landed groups, who had lost their legitimacy in the eyes of the mass of the people, were no longer in a position to buttress the state's authority.

During the reign of Suhadeva three people who migrated to Kashmir played an important role in its political affairs sooner or later. One of them was Rinchan who was destined to become the first ruler of Kashmir to accept Islam. Another was Shah Mir who was destined to become the founder of the sultanate of Kashmir. The third person to migrate

to Kashmir in the reign of Suhadeva was Lankar Chak whose descendants were to found the second dynasty of the sultans of Kashmir.

Rinchan had come to Kashmir from Tibet where, apparently, he was holding an important political position. He was welcomed by Rama Chand, the commander of Suhadeva's army. Kashmir was invaded and devastated by Zulchu who is said to have entered Kashmir at the head of 70,000 Mongol and Turk soldiers and horsemen. 'Chroniclers of the events of Kashmir have not recorded an event more disastrous and catastrophic than Zulchu's raid.'¹ Suhadeva fled from his capital before all the buildings of the city were burnt and the whole of Kashmir was subjected to destruction for about eight months. Jonaraja describes Zulchu's ravages in the following terms: 'Depopulated, uncultivated, grainless, and graminaceous, the country of Kashmir offered as it were, the sight of primal chaos.'²

The author of the *Baharistan-i-Shahi* states that Kashmir fell into a state of chaos and confusion due to Zulchu's ravages, and it took considerable time to repair the loss. The invasion had serious political implications:

In each *pargana* villagers joined hands and strengthened their forts. They chose one among them as their leader and claimed to be independent and autocratic. They were not prepared to submit themselves to one another's authority. Although some of them did recognize the governor of the city as their overlord and sent presents and gifts to him, yet, strictly speaking, they did not observe the norms of loyalty and submission.³

In this situation, Rinchan raised a group of soldiers and got Rama Chand killed through a plot. His son Ravan Chand, and his wife and children were taken prisoner, and Rinchan became the ruler of the land. He bestowed favours upon Ravan Chand, giving him territory and the title 'Raina', which was later retained by his descendants. Rinchan married Rama Chand's daughter. When Suhadeva tried to return to Kashmir he was defeated by Rinchan and obliged to retreat. The government remained in Rinchan's hands.

Rinchan tried to be just to all his subjects to reconcile them to his rule. Only a few people of Kashmir had embraced Islam by this time. Influenced by a *darvesh* named Bulbul Qalandar, Rinchan embraced Islam, becoming the first Muslim ruler of Kashmir. He got a khanqah built for Bulbul Qalandar and assigned revenue-free land to it so that he could meet the expenses of his kinsfolk, his followers, and casual visitors to the khanqah, which became a durable institution. Rinchan also built a large mosque for congregational prayers, especially on Fridays. He associated Shah Mir with his government and administration.⁴ During a fresh invasion of Kashmir by the Mongols after Rinchan's death, Shah Mir conducted negotiations that turned out to be successful. After the departure of the Mongols from Kashmir, he succeeded in winning the support of the local chiefs and ascended the throne of Kashmir as Sultan Shamsuddin.

Sultan Shamsuddin tried to buttress the foundations of his state by befriending the important secular elements within the local nobility and seeking their association with the administration of the state. He initiated this process by marrying his son to the local noble Lakshimaka's daughter.⁵ He also chose Chaks and Magrays, the local landed elements, for manning the standing army. The other measures of the sultan included the abolition of all oppressive taxes and reduction of land revenue to one-sixth of the total produce.⁶ All these measures appear to have been motivated essentially by political considerations necessary for achieving political stability. Similarly, the standing army helped the state to demonstrate its power, and to contain the growth of private power which could be directed against the state itself. Moreover, by using Chaks and Magrays for raising his standing army, the sultan tried to set these families of nobles against the others.⁷ The families of Chaks and

Magrays took on the role of structuring and restructuring power relations till ultimately the Chaks would establish their political dominance.⁸

Sultan Shamsuddin ordered the *khutba* to be read and coins struck in his name.⁹ He introduced and promoted the Hanfīa doctrine, and created endowments for those who aided him in this task.¹⁰ To further signify that the new state was a necessary consequence of the spread of Islam in Kashmir, he changed the *Lāukikā* calendar.¹¹ All these measures reveal the sultan's concern for the state to function in accordance with Islamic practices.¹² This process was carried forward by his successors.

During Sultan Shihabuddin's reign (1353–73) a large number of Sufis entered Kashmir.¹³ Most of them claimed the status of Saiyids, migrating to Kashmir from various parts of Central Asia not simply because they were imbued with religious zeal, but also because they were compelled to migrate due to political circumstances. Kashmir appeared to be the right place for opportunities of power, wealth, and prestige thrown up by a new Islamic state.¹⁴ Sultan Shihabuddin made all arrangements for the rehabilitation of Saiyids who migrated to Kashmir during his reign. They could be expected to give a definite direction to the state. In any case, the sultan granted large fertile tracts of land for the maintenance of their establishments. Saiyid Hasan Simnani and Saiyid Haidar were granted a number of villages in Kulgam pargana. Nagam pargana was granted to Saiyid Tajuddin and Saiyid Hasan.¹⁵ The sultan also opened a number of madrassas for the teaching of the *Qur'ān*, *hadis*, and *fiqh*.¹⁶

Sultan Shihabuddin is said to have 'welded the whole of Kashmir into a single unit. Some of the defiant chiefs and lords of parganas were put to the sword and the others were brought under subjugation'. The sultan also made new conquests in the direction of Pakhli, Nagarkot, Kishtwar, Gilgit, Dardu, and Tibet. According to the author of the *Baharistan-i-Shahi*, Sultan Shihabuddin came to an understanding with Firoz Shah Tughluq, according to which land up to Sirhind came under the control of Sultan Shihabuddin. He is believed to have imposed several new taxes, and to have obliged the boatmen to render free service to the king for one week in a month. He was perhaps the first sultan of Kashmir to build a tomb for his own burial. 'Towards the fag end of his life he was infused with a zeal for demolishing idol-houses and destroying the temples and idols of the infidels'.¹⁷

Many Saiyid families entered Kashmir with their leader Saiyid Ali Hamadani during the reign of Sultan Qutbuddin (1373–89) and they too were allotted land. Saiyid Jamaluddin Ali got Chitar area in pargana Khourpara and Saiyid Firoz was allotted Sempora and its surrounding villages in pargana Vihi. Saiyid Kamal got the entire area of Naidkhai. Mir Saiyid Kazim was granted the area of Lethopora. Pargana Olar was granted to Mir Saiyid Ruknuddin and Mir Saiyid Fakhruddin. Saiyid Jamaluddin, who was well-versed in Islamic theology, was asked to stay in Srinagar for consultation by the sultan on important occasions.¹⁸ Mir Saiyid Muhammad Qureshi and Mir Saiyid Muhammad Abdullah were also granted land and other facilities in Bijbehara.¹⁹

Besides a tomb, the sultan built a lofty palace for himself and close to his tomb developed in due course a graveyard in which many god-fearing men and saints were buried. Saiyid Ali Hamadani exercised great influence over the sultan. When he came to know that the sultan had married two sisters, he advised him to divorce one of them. Even with the second sister a new marriage was contracted from which the future Sultan Sikandar was born. Sultan Qutbuddin adopted the Muslim dress on the advice of Saiyid Ali Hamadani. The Saiyid's khanqah was founded on the site of a temple demolished for this purpose. Sultan Qutbuddin used occasionally to join the congregational prayers led by the Saiyid. The clan of Magrays rose to importance because of its chief's association with the Saiyid.

Ali Hamadani did not stay in Kashmir, but only because he felt that Sultan Qutbuddin was not propagating Islam in accordance with his wishes and aspirations.²⁰

With Sultan Sikandar (1389–1413) commenced a period of permanent interaction with the people of Central Asia. Three hundred Saiyids accompanied Saiyid Mir Muhammad when he arrived in Kashmir in 1393.²¹ Sultan Sikandar granted lands to them and made all the necessary arrangements for settling them in various parts of the valley. The khanqah of Mir Muhammad Hamadani in Alauddin Pora in the heart of Srinagar was endowed with several villages to provide subsistence to its inmates and for other expenses. Sikandar's reign became marked by an active participation of the Saiyids in the affairs of the state. He created the post of *shaikh ul-islam* to head the department of ecclesiastic affairs and the judiciary, and offered this to the Saiyids to enforce the shari'ah on Hindu converts to Islam. The Hindus got marginalized in Kashmir.²² The combining of the office of the shaikh ul-islam with judicial administration had very significant political overtones. The application of Muslim law, with its notions of legal equality, could help to attract more and more people towards Islam and indeed towards the new political system. The concentration of judicial powers in the hands of the shaikh ul-islam proved to be an important instrument for exercising hegemony over the population to strengthen the centralizing spirit of the state's authority.

The author of the *Baharistan* refers to Sultan Sikandar as the 'idol-breaker'. All traces of intoxicants were wiped off during his reign. 'The clamour of the drum and the trumpet, and the shrill notes of the fife and the clarion no longer reached people's ears, except in battles and assaults.' Eminent scholars from various cities and places came to Kashmir. Saiyid Muhammad Khawari, the author of the *Khawarnamah*, wrote a commentary on the *Lum'at*. Hasan Shirazi, whom Sultan Sikandar appointed qazi, composed a work on the hadis. A large number of Sufis also came to Kashmir in the reign of Sultan Sikandar. Among them was Saiyid Ahmad Madani who came from Madina with his family and settled in the land. His tomb became a shrine to be frequented by people for the fulfilment of their desires. There is hardly any doubt about a great influx of Sufis and Saiyids during the reign of Sultan Sikandar.²³

In the eyes of the author of the *Baharistan*, the major achievements of Sikandar related to the sphere of religion. An upholder of the laws of Islam, the sultan granted houses, hamlets, villages, and habitations to the learned, ascetics, pious, Saiyids, and qazis by way of hereditary endowments. A large number of hamlets and villages selected from each pargana were placed at the disposal of the shaikh ul-islam so that stipends and alms could be provided to the learned, the qāzis, the Saiyids, the mendicants, the needy, the pilgrims, and the travellers. The khanqah of Saiyid Ali Hamadani was endowed with a few villages. The sultan also built a hospital (*dar ul-shifa*) where medicines and other requirements were provided for patients. Physicians and other medical men were given stipends and financial assistance to enable them to attend to the sick. Besides a magnificent palace, Sultan Sikandar built a lofty and imposing Jami mosque designed by Khawaja Sadruddin who had come from Khurasan. The sultan also laid out a burial ground for the royal dead.²⁴

II

During the fourteenth century, Muslim immigrants from Central Asia and Persia brought new technologies with them, and introduced horizontal mobility and economic prosperity among the lower social groups in Kashmir. Islam emerged as the principal instrument for

consolidating the state's authority. This enabled the community of Saiyids to emerge as the new political elite in the polity of Kashmir to occupy both religious and secular space.²⁵

Endowments to the Saiyids and their khanqahs, meant to provide relief for their families and followers, gave them control over land. They were fortunate enough to have fertile zones for farming; they derived income from the voluntary labour of their disciples on these lands, and also from gifts of produce from the peasants and artisans of their area.²⁶ With the unpaid labour of their disciples, they accumulated large fortunes. Over a period of time, the system of religious and secular grants, and the subjection of peasants and craftsmen to the grantees defined the social system within the valley. Their grants enabled the Saiyids in due course to designate their heirs as administrators in perpetuity. Gradually, the Saiyids adopted local traditions, at least with outward conformity, to build the public character of their khanqahs and estates. Their endowments were free from the exactions of the sultans and their officials.²⁷ Though the relationship on these estates cannot be characterized as feudal in the European sense, there were lots of constraints on the utilization of labour power. The state assumed feudal character in the sense that it primarily served the cause of surplus extraction by religious and secular elements, and did not check the process of sub-infeudation.²⁸ The generosity of the state in looking after the Saiyids won it their gratitude and gave them legitimacy in the eyes of the Muslim community of Kashmir. The preferential treatment given to the Saiyids cannot be attributed merely to their spiritual role; it was the direct consequence of the sultan's desire to consolidate his authority in the state and the desire of the Saiyids to ensure their monopoly of power.²⁹

Evidence on the relationship of religion and the state in Kashmir is still insufficient, but there is enough to indicate that among the many considerations on which it was based the most predominant was the objective of cooperation between Islam and the state to protect and buttress each other. In order to appreciate how the religious and political roles were brought into play in the processes of state formation in the world of Islam, it is necessary to know that the ideas and institutions that developed after the death of the Prophet have persisted down to modern times with regional variations.³⁰ The contribution of Islam was very significant in the field of religion, law, philosophy, science, art, and literature, but the tradition handed down was not necessarily the same for all parts of the Islamic world.³¹

The efforts of the Saiyids indirectly demanded the absolute obedience of the people to the state as a religious obligation based on the Quranic injunction: 'Obey God, obey the Prophet and obey those with authority amongst you.' It was this obligation that the newly established sultanate in Kashmir came to regard as essential for the maintenance of its authority. In the course of time the relations between the state and the Saiyids became very close and complex, based on mutual needs but divergent interests. The state needed legitimacy and the Saiyids a privileged position.³²

The great majority of the Saiyids resided in rural areas, where their establishments took roots securely, and created the social base of power for the state. In urban centres too they adapted themselves to the conditions of urban life and developed into an organization. They derived special advantages from their links with the powerful aristocracy, both rural and urban.³³ Though the Saiyids differed from the Kashmiri-speaking people in language, ethos, and privilege, they did not take much time to develop the dominant orders, such as the Suharwardi, Qadiri, and Naqshbandi, to exercise pervasive influence on the social, economic, political, and cultural life of Kashmir.³⁴ The importance of their role in a society stratified on social, economic, and religious bases could scarcely be underestimated.³⁵

The emergence of the Saiyids as a ruling elite in Kashmir was reflected not only in the multiplication of khanqahs and the Sufi orders, but also in the functioning of the state.³⁶ They acted as the authoritative spokesmen of various social groups in legal, social, and religious matters. They played a crucial role in the process of social communication for social integration.³⁷ They led the people in prayers and on other religious occasions, and came to form a distinct stratum in the society. As guardians of a shared system of beliefs, values, and practices, they penetrated the whole society, performing varied functions and attracting various degrees of public respect and allegiance.³⁸

Saiyid Ali Hamadani of the Suharwardi order tried to set the pattern for his order. Its members were avowedly prepared to die for their convictions. They opened the way for the application of Islamic tenets in the offices of the sultanate.³⁹ Asserting the importance of the members of his order, he justified the necessity of recourse to Islamic precedents and the sharia.⁴⁰ The pre-Islamic social and religious life of Kashmir was an anathema to Saiyid Ali Hamadani and his devoted disciples. In their eyes it militated against the Islam of the Prophet and the pious Khalifas. They were anxious to free the Muslims of Kashmir from the residual features of their Hindu life. Saiyid Ali took upon himself the task of transforming Kashmir. He first preached true Islam to Sultan Qutbuddin, both by precept and example; his sway over the mind of the sultan was complete. He collected important rules of the sharia for the guidance of the sultan and appointed his trusted disciples as his religious mentors. He made a gift of his *kulāh-i mubārāk* (auspicious headgear) to the sultan and blessed his progeny with long life.⁴¹ The Saiyids sought official positions in civil and judicial administration to promote their own interests. The prospect of getting land and offices was their one unifying principle. They were concerned with masses because he who could win the people's support, or claim their allegiance in any particular area, could also claim corresponding prominence in the sultan's court.⁴²

Sultan Sikandar appears to have worked under the impression that a true sultan was what he was, not by his own will, but by the grace of the Saiyids who could influence the public for consent to his rulership. The exercise of authority by the Saiyids could play a great role in perpetuating his sovereignty because their authority in the functions of the state could be seen as the fulfilment of divine precepts.⁴³ The Saiyids themselves emphasized that promotion of Islamization was necessary for the extension of the authority of the sultan in society. The validation of his claim to sovereignty depended on his acceptance of their advice for dealing with the affairs of the state.⁴⁴ Sultan Sikandar perhaps felt that Islam was the only basis of political unity and the spread of Islam at the hands of the Saiyids constituted his main claim to the loyalty of his subjects. The stability of the state thus appeared to be linked with Islam and its acceptance by the majority. The Saiyid migrants kept on penetrating rural and urban society not only with new religious messages, but also with new ideas and techniques of craft production. They controlled the socio-economic life of the rural poor and retained control over a large portion of cultivable waste in areas like Vihi, Nagam, Sempora, Tral, Nunwaani, Chitar, Avantipora, Naidkhai, Martand, Bijbehara, Khourpara, Lar, Pakh, Vachi, Soura, Kulgam, and Biru.⁴⁵ Social status, wealth, and respect were available to them as a landed aristocracy enjoying state patronage.⁴⁶ Their influence in the secular areas of the state's functioning helped them develop an effective coordination of action and orderly allocation of their spheres of political influence. No official, even if he desired, could stand aloof. He had either to resign himself to official inactivity or to act according to the instruction of the Saiyids to retain his official position.⁴⁷

Even at the rural level the Saiyids overshadowed the non-Saiyid nobles. Both derived their strength from the village extraction, but the Saiyids had assumed more extensive and

arbitrary powers by settling disputes, divorces, and punishments, and by presiding over various socio-religious occasions as qazis, *muftis*, or *imams*, being well versed in Muslim theology, though at times unfamiliar with local traditions.⁴⁸ Moreover, a wide network of inter-family relations among the Saiyids provided readymade machinery for arbitration of disputes, which would have otherwise been referred to the court of the sultan.⁴⁹ The Saiyids worked for the sultans to extract a price for their cooperation to increase their own power, wealth, and prestige.

Under Sultan Sikandar the Saiyids sought a clear mandate from him to deal with all matters. Their influence led to a series of civil strife, which the sultan was forced to put down with a strong hand. Sikandar's reign was one of the critical periods in the history of Kashmir. His contemporary chronicler, Pandit Jonaraja, does not dwell on his reign objectively or with critical appreciation. The iconoclasm of Sikandar seems to have shocked him more than anything else in the state. He failed to notice the ideological significance of the measures of the sultan who was vigorously trying to establish firm foundations in the state with the help of the Saiyids. The persecution of Hindus and destruction of their religious establishments highlighted the interdependence of Islam and the state. To generate political stability for the sultanate, Islam needed a coercive arm where persuasion did not work.⁵⁰ By the end of Sikandar's reign the Saiyids had become so powerful that they dominated both the secular and the religious jurisdiction of the state and society, and exercised something of a politico-cultural hegemony. Their ambition soon led to competing alliances, each drawing recruits from several social levels of power, prestige, and wealth, to grab political power.⁵¹

Zutshi remarks that in 'the sweep of his religious enthusiasm enforced by exhortations of religious fanatics, Sikander was carried off his balance and committed excesses against non-Muslim subjects'. There was a widespread confusion in their ranks, and it became worse under Ali Shah (1413–19) who perpetuated atrocities of a greater magnitude, but failed to restructure government after the Islamic fashion, for he was a weak and inefficient ruler.⁵²

III

In the reign of Sultan Ali Shah the Saiyids joined hands with his prime minister, Saifuddin (Suha Bhatta before his conversion to Islam), to extract taxes and to coerce the subjects of the sultan.⁵³ Ali Shah became totally ineffective when Mir Qaisar led the Saiyids in directing the apparatus of the state for their personal ends. They threw Kashmir in a state of confusion by violating the wives of Kashmiris, subjecting them to all sorts of oppression. Even the sultan's property was not spared. According to Jonaraja, lofty homes, excellent houses, fine dresses, large gems, and all that adorned the king were now wrested by the *yavanas* (foreign Muslims).

With the emergence of the Saiyids as the ruling elite, the non-Saiyid elements in the nobility found their spheres of interest curtailed, their positions challenged, and their power threatened. The domination of the Saiyids was seen by them as a threat to their very survival.⁵⁴ However, both the Saiyid and the non-Saiyid nobility had political goals that set them at odds with the state. Therefore, the state was weakened in proportion to the increase in the power of the Saiyids. Sultan Ali Shah lost the ability to rule.⁵⁵ The crisis at this stage was halted by Shahi Khan, popularly known as Zain ul-Abidin.⁵⁶

In his efforts to strengthen his claims to capture power, Zain ul-Abidin (1420–70) depended on the non-Saiyid nobility. He entered into an alliance with Thakurs and other

local chiefs of southern Kashmir to wrest power from his rival claimant Yusuf Khan, who was defeated and killed at the *idgah* in Srinagar in 1418.⁵⁷ Zain ul-Abidin tried to evolve strong and coherent traditions to strengthen the state. He never allowed the Saiyids to grab dictatorial powers in his court. He did not hesitate to expel Saiyid Mak when the latter ignored the sultan's abrogation of certain taxes that some of Saiyid Mak's followers used to collect from non-Muslim subjects for using the cremation ground.⁵⁸ He put up the semblance of a Muslim ruler by seeking recognition from the Abbasid Caliph of Egypt as the legal basis of his authority in the eyes of Islamic orthodoxy and by calling himself Amir ul-Muminin.⁵⁹ He recognized the existence of Zimmis in his kingdom and realized jizya, but its rate was drastically reduced and it was never actually collected.⁶⁰ Zain ul-Abidin used the post of the shaikh ul-islam for the enforcement of the sharia in his dominions, but he never allowed his own decisions regarding the state and society to be influenced by the shaikh ul-islam.⁶¹

Sultan Zain ul-Abidin was politically liberal and looked upon the Saiyids as the most obvious brake on the affairs of the state. An elaborate administrative system and a strong standing army were essential for strengthening the basis of his power, and this was not possible without the participation of the non-Saiyid nobility in the affairs of the state. He felt more and more concerned for rebuilding their identity. Tilka Acharya was one of the most important officials of the sultan.⁶² Jaya Bhatta was his treasurer, while Shriya Bhatta and Ganapati Gaurak manned the judicial administration. Malik Autar Chand was the commander of the army and Kanch-Dammara was the city prefect.⁶³ The other important nobles at his court were Nothsoma, Yodha Bhatta, Avtar Bhatta, Darya Khan, Shaikh Nuruddin, Mulla Qazi Khan, Mulla Kabir Kashmiri, Sita Kantha, Siva Bhatta, Mansur bin Muhammad, Pandit Srivara, Mulla Ahmad Kashmiri, Mulla Nadri, Pandit Jonaraja, Karpura Bhatta, Rupya Bhatta, Sinha, Rajanak, Rig, Abmanyu, and Jamil Hafiz, among others.⁶⁴

In a very little time he rationalized and reformed the administration and put new vigour into the fiscal system. To ensure adequate economic surplus for the state, he took immense interest in agricultural production and expansion. Srivara, the contemporary chronicler of the sultan, quotes him: 'For the love that I have for my subjects I have augmented the production of my country three-fold with the help of canals, and extended cultivation by other means.'⁶⁵ The promotion of crafts like metalwork, woodwork, wood-carving, papier mache, carpet-weaving, book-binding, stone-polishing, bottle-making, gold-beating, window-cutting, and various other activities brought new foreign forms of craft and manufacture to the state.⁶⁶

For importing new designs and skills, the sultan invited artists from Sijistan, Iraq, Samarkand, Herat, Khurasan, Gilan, Balkh, Bukhara, Gujarat, and various other parts of the world.⁶⁷ The relations with these countries were not limited to exchange of periodic gifts. A widespread foreign influence on people of Kashmir opened a new phase of development in the technology and economy. Zain ul-Abidin's reign saw the emergence of new towns that grew into regional metropolises with the concentration of officials, merchants, craftsmen, and a high level of commercial activity. In the course of time there emerged new economic elite that aspired for political power.

In his attitude towards the neighbouring regions, Sultan Zain ul-Abidin did not concentrate on mighty military activities against them for he felt that the political existence of small regions was necessary so long as they did not grow in wealth and power to challenge his own supremacy. He had no desire to dissolve them. His relations with Jasrat Khokhar and the feudatories of Jammu, Naushera, Rajauri, Lohara, Ladakh, and Kishtwar clearly

indicate that his attitude towards them had an ideological underpinning for political pluralism under the umbrella of the sultanate.⁶⁸

Sultan Zain ul-Abidin concentrated on various aspects of education, culture, and craft production as the primary mechanism to maintain order in society and to create a social basis of his power with secular infrastructure. 'Zain-ul-Abidin was in theory the head of an absolute monarchy concentrating all executive, legislative and judicial powers in his hands. But in practice he was a kind and benevolent ruler and his rule was an enlightened autocracy.'⁶⁹ He patronized men of learning and learned men of great repute flocked to his court from foreign lands. They received lavish gifts and favours from the sultan and settled in Kashmir. He collected a large number of genuine and rare books for the royal library, including a rare copy of the *Kashshaf*. The courtiers as well as the men of learning of his time were experts in the art of versification and subtle in discourse. The sultan himself possessed a poetic sensibility and was adept at writing verses under the pen-name of Qutb. A number of famous saints flourished during his reign. 'In short, he was a ruler who did his utmost for the progress and prosperity of his subjects; who took keen interest in the rehabilitation and building up of the state; whose benevolence and munificence prompted artists and craftsmen to gain excellence in their skills.'⁷⁰

An important aspect of the reign of Sultan Zain ul-Abidin was his attitude towards the non-Muslims. They were allowed complete freedom of worship and some of the temples destroyed in the earlier reigns were rebuilt. Some of the people who had gone to Jammu and Kishtwar because of the policies of the earlier sultans were induced to return to Kashmir. Patronage was extended to the learned among the Hindus and the sultan himself attended many of their festivities and 'distributed gifts among dancers, stage actors, musicians and women singers so that all people, high and low, found themselves happy and satisfied with him'. Significantly, the author of the *Baharistan* looks upon Zain ul-Abidin's attitude as a conspicuous defect and an overall drawback, regretting that idolatry and heresy, which had been stamped out by Sultan Sikandar, were revived by him. Understandably, the community of infidels and heretics called him the 'Great King' (*bādshāh*), and he came to be known by this name throughout his kingdom.⁷¹

Stability of the state was achieved by Sultan Zain ul-Abidin by balancing the power of the Saiyid and non-Saiyid nobility. Among the latter were both Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir. But this stability lasted only for a short period. After his death in 1470, the state in Kashmir lost its hegemonic character because of the ceaseless struggle of the Saiyids and the rival factions of the local nobility for dominance, which gradually pushed the state and society in Kashmir into a vortex of economic and social collapse.

IV

The sultanate of Kashmir began to decline after the death of Sultan Zain ul-Abidin. He was succeeded by his son Haidar Shah who ruled for a few years and was succeeded by his son Sultan Hasan Shah. Hundreds of Indian singers, both men and women, were inducted by Hasan Shah in his service, in addition to the Kashmiri musicians, singers, and instrumentalists employed in his household. The affairs of the state were managed by Malik Ahmad Itoo, Sehej Raina, and Ahmad Magray. Some of the outlying areas of Kashmir were lost by the sultanate due to mutual feuds and in-fighting among the nobles of Kashmir. The reign of Sultan Hasan Shah is also known for the arrival of Shamsuddin Iraqi and his residence

in Kashmir for a number of years. On Hasan Shah's death, his son ascended the throne at the early age of seven as Sultan Muhammad Shah.⁷²

Sultan Muhammad Shah had a long and chequered reign. In its early part the control of the government was in the hands of the Saiyids of Baihaq, led by Saiyid Hasan. He looked upon the Kashmiri chiefs and commanders as 'not a bit higher than his servants and attendants'. He proclaimed that public affairs would be managed strictly according to the sharia. He promised to abide by the commands of the *Quran* while dealing with the matters of the state. The Kashmiri chiefs found it difficult to adjust themselves to the authority of Saiyid Hasan and he was murdered along with a number of his brothers and nephews. His son Mir Muhammad retaliated but eventually, a truce was concluded. Mir Muhammad returned to India and administrative authority now rested in the hands of Ahmad Magray. The reign of Muhammad Shah was marked by factional struggle among the nobles of Kashmir in support of the sultan, his uncle Fateh Shah, or his son Ibrahim. The individuals who played some role in this situation on one side or the other were Malik Shams Chak, son of Helmet Chak, Malik Nauroz Itoo, son of Ahmad Itoo, Husain Chak, son of Pandav Chak, Malik Saif Dar, Malik Musa Raina, Malik Shankar Raina, Jahangir Padar, Malik Kaji Chak, Sayyid Muhammad Baihaki, Malik Bahram Dar, Shamsuddin Iraqi, Ibrahim Magray, and Malik Usman. Not all of them survived the reign of Sultan Muhammad Shah.⁷³

The author of the *Baharistan-i Shahi* appreciates the role of Malik Musa Raina and Shamsuddin Iraqi when the former held the reins of administration. Under the guidance of Shamsuddin Iraqi, he enforced the laws and religious tenets of Islam so that 'the pure religion of Muhammad and the prosperity of the Muslim community reached the highest pinnacle'. With the support of Malik Musa Raina, Shamsuddin Iraqi undertook a wholesale destruction of temples and construction of mosques in their place. As the author of the *Baharistan* puts it, 'During his lifetime with the virtuous efforts and elaborate arrangements made by the fortunate Malik Musa Raina, 24,000 staunch infidels and stubborn heretics were ennobled by being converted to the Islamic faith.' After Sultan Sikandar, none among the Muslims who wielded authority over Kashmir rendered so much service to Islam as Malik Musa Raina.⁷⁴

Muhammad Shah was succeeded by his son Sultan Shams Shah who was succeeded by his brother Ismail Shah. They ruled only for a few years when Malik Kaji Chak was the administrative head. Ismail Shah was his son-in-law and remained only a titular king. His authority was limited to the striking of coins and reading of the khutba in his name. Malik Kaji Chak held absolute power during his reign. 'This was a time when Islamic religion and the customs of this faith reached the heights of its glory.'⁷⁵

The rulers of Delhi had begun to take interest in the affairs of Kashmir by the beginning of the sixteenth century. Sikander Lodi, for example, helped Sultan Muhammad Shah to regain his throne, which had been occupied by his uncle Fateh Khan. Babur helped Fateh Khan's son Sikandar, though he failed to gain any influence in Kashmir. When Muhammad Shah was dethroned in 1525 and his son Ibrahim was raised to the throne, the supporters of Muhammad Shah invoked the aid of Babur and placed Muhammad Shah back. The discontented party approached Kamran to conquer Kashmir. The cruelty of his soldiers drove the Kashmiri factions into a temporary union that was strong enough to beat him back.

Some of the Chak and Magray chiefs, who were dissatisfied with the ascendancy of Malik Kaji Chak, approached Humayun in 1540 to invade Kashmir. With his approval, Mirza Haidar Dughlat invaded Kashmir, occupied it without much resistance, and got the

khutba read and coins struck in Humayun's name. Malik Kaji Chak approached Sher Shah for help. He sent Husain Khan Sherwani with a handful of troops to assist Kaji Chak. But this expedition on behalf of Ismail Shah ended in failure. A similar attempt in the time of Islam Shah also failed. Mirza Haidar was able to establish friendly relations with Islam Shah. Saiyid Ahmad Majzub, a Nur Bakhshi leader, came to Kashmir and Mirza Haidar outwardly expressed faith in the Nur Bakhshia order but inwardly bore enmity towards it. Dealing successfully with the recalcitrant Regi Chak and Idi Raina, Mirza Haidar revealed his animosity towards the Shias. 'His rabid fanaticism and deep seated malice touched such proportions that he issued an order to destroy the holy khanqah of Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi and started killing Muslims and the faithful.'⁷⁶ Hazrat Rishi and Shaikh Daniyal suffered death.

Soon afterwards Mirza Haidar received the news of a revolt in Tibet. In his expedition against the rebels, he sustained a fatal blow and died. Malik Idi Raina installed Nazuk Shah as sultan of Kashmir, retaining all power in his own hands. But he died after a year to be replaced by Malik Daulat Chak who rebuilt the khanqah of Shamsuddin Iraqi that had been destroyed by Mirza Haidar. A few villages were earmarked for the maintenance of Iraqi's descendants out of the old endowments, and the khanqah began to be frequented by the Shias. Malik Daulat Chak revived the Hamadani order too and extended support to Baba Hasan to build a khanqah. He brought Sufis of the Hamadani order to his khanqah from different parts of Kashmir to revive the practices of the order and the Nur Bakhshia sect. At the same time, he proclaimed that 'all citizens and aliens were free to profess any faith they wished and that no one could either dictate or obstruct others in this matter'.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, Kashmir was hopelessly divided under nominal rulers who were made and unmade in quick succession. Five kings ruled over Kashmir in eight years before the Shah Mir dynasty lost the throne finally to Ghazi Khan Chak in 1560. Shortly afterwards he transferred power to his brother, Husain Khan, who was succeeded by his brother Ali Shah.⁷⁸

Akbar's relations with Sultan Husain Shah and Sultan Ali Shah were not unsatisfactory. In 1572 Prince Salim was married to the niece of Ali Shah who proclaimed Akbar as the sovereign of Kashmir in public prayers. On Ali Shah's death in 1578-79, his son Yusuf ascended the throne, but a civil war broke out and Yusuf was obliged to seek Akbar's protection. The emperor despatched Man Singh for his assistance in 1580. The Kashmiris sued for peace, but requested Yusuf to come alone. He slipped away without informing Man Singh and seated himself on the throne. In 1584 he was asked to come to the Mughal court and pay homage to the emperor but instead of coming personally he sent his son Haidar first and then his elder son Yakub. This did not satisfy Akbar. In 1585 Yakub fled from the imperial camp, and Akbar sent an order for Yusuf to come in person or to send Yakub to the court. Yusuf did not comply, and Akbar deputed Prince Shahrukh and Raja Bhagwan Das to invade Kashmir. After a well-contested but indecisive battle, Bhagwan Das was able to persuade Yusuf to come to his camp. However, the Kashmiri nobles placed Yakub on the throne. Bhagwan Das was in a critical position and felt obliged to patch up with him. According to the terms of this agreement, the khutba and coins were to bear Akbar's name, and the dues from saffron, shawls, and the mint were to be sent to the imperial treasury. Akbar refused to recognize this treaty and, meanwhile, Yakub ordered the khutba to be read and coins struck in his own name.⁷⁹

Akbar decided to conquer Kashmir. He sent Qasim Khan to deal with Yakub who had now assumed the title of Shah Ismail. Unfortunately for him, Yakub's policy had revived the fanaticism of Shias and Sunnis, and alienated some nobles. The Mughal troops reached Srinagar in October 1586 and got the khutba read in Akbar's name. Yakub fled

from Srinagar to continue his opposition. Qasim Khan was replaced by Mirza Yusuf who finally compelled Yakub to surrender in 1589. He was pardoned and given a mansab of 500 with a small jagir in Bihar.⁵⁰ The sultan of Kashmir who refused to compromise his sovereignty was obliged at last to become a mansabdar of the Mughal empire.

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CHAPTER 4

The Vijayanagar State

Y. Subbarayalu

I

The Vijayanagar state is noted not only for its geographical and linguistic sweep, but also for its rich historiography.¹ Ever since the 'Forgotten Empire' was discovered in 1900, it has been engaging the attention of south India scholars. The most productive phase of its historiography fell between 1920 and 1940. The next three decades produced only a few regional monographs.² Again, there has been a renewed interest in the subject during the last two decades.

In the 1930s, when a comprehensive account of the Vijayanagar empire was attempted by several scholars, undue attention was paid to two things: the origins of the kingdom, particularly the linguistic affiliation of the founders of that kingdom, and the supposedly anti-Muslim stand of the Vijayanagar state. On the first point, a lot of acrimonious debate took place; it was mostly irrational and unproductive. On the second point almost all scholars were unanimous in emphasizing that the Vijayanagar empire rose to protect the Hindu *dharma* against the onslaughts of the alien Muslims.³ It was also stressed that the Vijayanagar rulers were highly patriotic and nationalistic in their outlook. But 'nationalism' could have different meanings for the same scholar. What confronted the Muslim 'enemies' was 'Hindu' nationalism. But in relation to the origins of the founders the question became one of linguistic and regional nationalism. For Telugu historians it was the Andhra nation; for Kannada scholars it was the Karnataka. It is rather interesting to note that opposing arguments were based upon the same kind of 'traditional' sources.⁴

II

Had the disputing scholars paid some attention to the linguistic map of the core area and the territorial reach of the Vijayanagar kingdom over the three centuries of its existence, the discussion could have been more productive. The effective Vijayanagar sovereignty was

confined during the reigns of the first (Sangama) dynasty to the Kannada country south of the Krishna–Tungbhadra and northern parts of the Tamil country. The Telugu area south of the Krishna was effectively incorporated in the state only under the Tuluva dynasty early in the sixteenth century.⁵ The Sangama rulers seem to have taken over the Hoysala territory almost intact,⁶ and built upon that by consolidating their rule over Karnataka and northern parts of Tamil Nadu including the Kaveri delta. The area further south in Tamil Nadu was on the periphery only. Though Kampana, son of Bukka I, claimed to have destroyed the Madurai sultanate in the third quarter of the fourteenth century, the Madurai area was not incorporated in the Vijayanagar administration immediately and it remained outside the *rājya* set-up until the end.

Scholars who write on the Vijayanagar period usually give minor importance to the pre-Krishna phase and assume that the reign of Krishnadevaraya explains everything. Actually the preceding two centuries were equally significant historically and rather different from what is known as the high watermark of the empire in the first half of the sixteenth century. In the course of the three centuries of its existence the Vijayanagar state was ruled over by four different dynasties: Sangama (1336–1485), Saluva (1486–1505), Tuluva (1506–1570), and Aravidu (1571–1650). Within a few decades of its foundation the state could incorporate most parts of Karnataka south of the Krishna river and the northern districts of Tamil Nadu. Despite several expeditions to the north of the Krishna against the Bahmani sultanate, the effective northern boundary ran mostly along the Krishna river. The control of the seaports, particularly Goa, was a major aim of the warfare with the Bahmani state. As the founders, Harihara I and Bukka I, and their immediate successors consolidated their territorial acquisitions, they tried to organize the territory by creating the administrative divisions called *rājyas* or provinces under a superior government officer called *pradhāni*. In the early decades the *pradhāni* happened to be a prince and later he was generally a military officer not related to the royal family. The headquarters of each *rājya* was called a *chāvaḍi* (or *uchāvaḍi*); the term was also used as an alternative designation for *rājya*. The *rājyas*, nearly thirty-five in all, incorporated in them the already existing local-level ethno-social territories like the *nāḍu*, *paruru* (in Tamil country), *sīma* (in its restricted sense), and *kampana*. Regarding the hierarchy of local level territorial units, there is still not much clarity.⁷

The *rājyas* were important administrative and revenue units until the early sixteenth century, but lost their original importance once the *nāyaka* (or *nāyankara*) system matured under Krishnadevaraya and his successor.⁸ The names of *rājyas* are of course mentioned even in the sixteenth century, but they survived then only as a geographical nomenclature without administrative significance. At this later stage several towns, including the headquarters of the earlier *rājyas*, are found as fortified garrisons (*durga*) under the control of *amara-nāyakas*. This is also mentioned by the *Rāyavāchakam*, a historical work of the early seventeenth century. This phenomenon has been wrongly interpreted by Venkataramanayya.⁹ According to him, the governors of *rājyas* or provinces were called *durga-dannaiks* (*durga-daṇṇāyakas*) meaning commanders of forts. As rulers of the forts, these commanders administered only the *bhaṇḍāravāḍa* or crown territory in their respective provinces, while there were other *amara-nayakas* who held territories surrounding the fort-towns in the same provinces, but who were not under the control of the provincial governors. The *durga-daṇṇāyaka*, being himself an *amara-nāyaka*, was compelled to stay in the king's court at Vijayanagar and ruled his province by proxy through an agent (*kāryakartā*). This rather confusing and unhappy construction of the polity by Venkataramanayya is due to the mixing up of evidence belonging to two different but succeeding phases. There is actually no evidence to distinguish *durga-daṇṇāyakas* from *amara-nāyakas*.

III

Venkataramanayya coined the *nāyankara* system to describe military tenure, called variously *nāyankaram*, *amara-nayankaram*, and sometimes *amara-māgaṇi* in Telugu inscriptions. Actually, it can be called the *nāyaka* system, as in Kannada and Tamil inscriptions the term *nāyaka-tanam* (literally *nāyaka*-ship) is used more often than the Telugu form *nāyankaram*.¹⁰ Basing himself on the *Rāyavachakam*, Venkataramanayya thought that most of the country was assigned by the Vijayanagar king to *nāyakas*, who were obliged to render military service in lieu of their holdings. Stein prefers to call this tenure just a prebendal right for a lordship of authority. But he does not reject the military duties and traces the *nāyaka* institution to the times of Devaraya II (1422–46) who gave greater importance to the army. Stein is not happy with the accounts of European visitors, like Paes and Nuniz, who provide eyewitness accounts of the *nāyaka* system. He thinks that the idea of ‘*nāyaka* system’ was the creation of these foreigners who lacked necessary linguistic skills or other means to verify the hearsay accounts.¹¹ Therefore, he does not look upon *nāyakas* as agents of centralized control of the *rayas* or Vijayanagar kings, as portrayed by Paes and Nuniz. Instead, he thinks that the evidence of Vijayanagar inscriptions and the later Mackenzie manuscripts portray them as territorial magnates pursuing political ends, which at times collided with the aims of the kings.

During the last one decade or so, Karashima has taken up a thorough analysis of the evidence relating to the *nāyakas*. His findings, based on data extracted from a contextual study of the Tamil inscriptional texts that are richer than the Telugu texts used by Venkataramanayya, provide answers to the questions raised by Stein.¹² According to Karashima’s estimate, there were nearly 500 *nāyakas* in the Tamil country and most of these *nāyakas* belonged to the post-1485 period. Several of the later *nāyakas* are said to be in possession of their own territory bestowed on them by the king as (or for) their *nāyakatanam*. These chiefs controlled production within their territories by creation of commercial centres (*pēṭṭai*) and markets, by encouraging settlement of cultivators and artisans with tax concessions, and by creating and maintaining irrigation facilities. Many of them started as high officials (commander, accountant, chamberlain, governor, etc.) and served as the king’s agents. They expressed their fealty symbolically through religious gifts for the king’s merit. Their close association with local temples as donors and protectors gave them not only social status but also rich material benefits. There is also some corroborative evidence from inscriptions for Nuniz’s statement that the *nāyakas* were obliged to stay at the capital and to leave the management of their respective territories to local agents. The local agents are found to be lower-ranking *nāyakas*, showing that there were hierarchical relations among the *nāyakas* themselves. As the sixteenth century wore on, the *nāyakas* became more and more independent of the king. Karashima confidently concludes that ‘the *nāyaka* system functioned as the state ruling system in the Tamil country for nearly 150 years from the last quarter of the 15th century’.

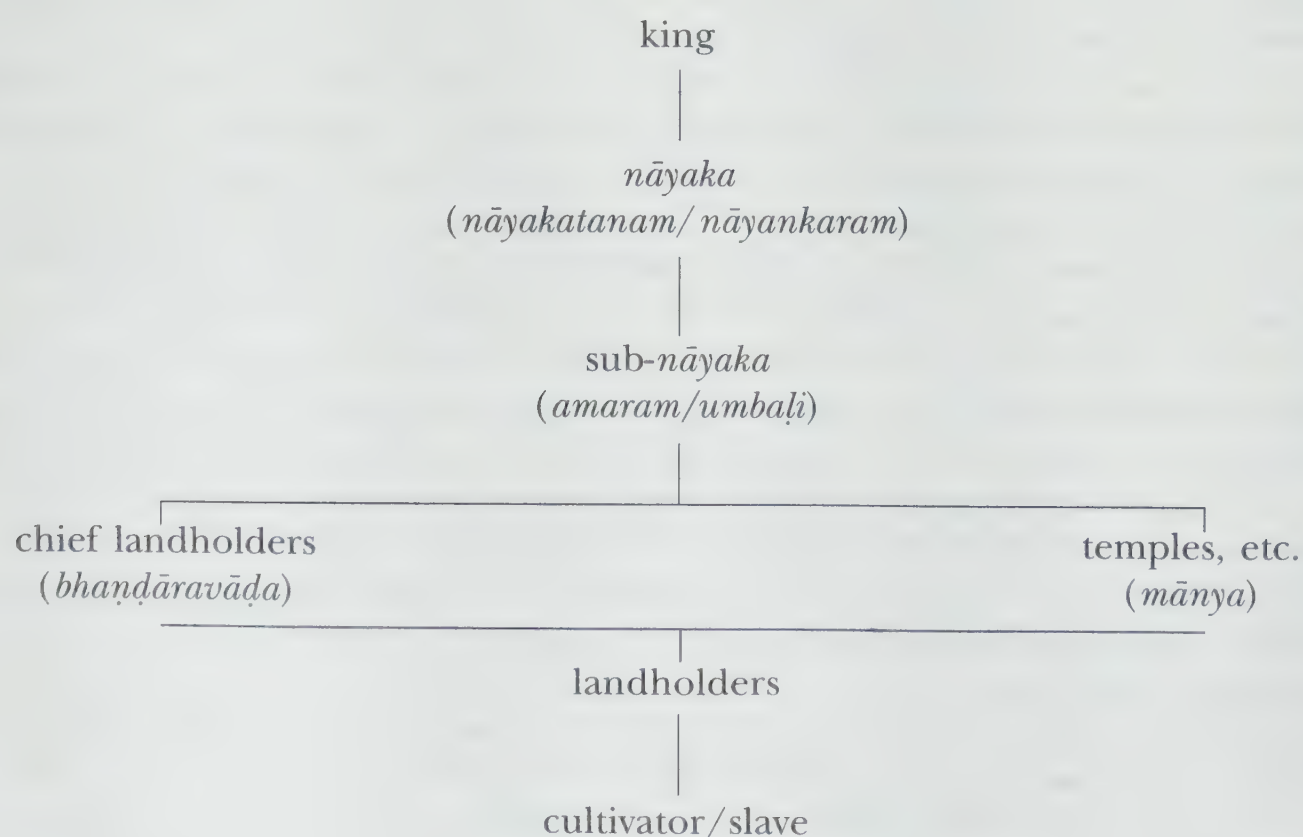
The agrarian structure of the Vijayanagar period shows a contrasting picture to that of the Chola period. According to Burton Stein, the agrarian activities came to be managed by well-differentiated ‘big men’, not the anonymous *nāṭṭār* of Chola times. He also stresses the fact that everywhere these ‘big men’ included, besides the ancient Vellala *nāṭṭār*, several outsiders, like, in the Tamil area, the Telugu Reddi from Andhra or the Tamil Kaḷḷar, leading to a land system of far greater complexity than that of the Chola period. But Stein’s suggestion that the village became the basic social arena of reproduction in the place of the earlier *naḍu* is not correct. The reduced area of agrarian activity was actually

the *parru* in Tamil country; elsewhere it was the *sima* (in its narrow sense) or some such area, which was bigger than a village but smaller than the previous *nāḍu*.

IV

Venkataramanayya classifies the tenurial system of the Vijayanagar times under three broad heads: *bhaṇḍāravāḍa*, *amara*, and *mānya*. According to him, *bhaṇḍāravāḍa* was the crown territory directly managed by king's officers (*durga-daṇṇāyaka* and his subordinates); *amara*, the most ubiquitous category, denoted the territory assigned to the *nāyakas*; and *mānya*, the tax-free category given to temples, etc. Stein accepts this classification with slight modifications and stresses that 'these categories pertain to only one aspect of land tenure during the Vijayanagar period, namely a classification of the disposition of the major portion of the proceeds of agricultural production on a village basis', that Vijayanagar inscriptions are concerned with new and public claims upon shares of village incomes, and that the 'rights in land' always refer to shares of income not 'dominion in land'.¹³ In any case, the complex, overlapping nature of land tenures has not been thoroughly investigated so far, and the concepts and hypotheses formulated in the incipient stage of Vijayanagar studies by the great pioneers are still being repeated without checking their veracity. Karashima has initiated an interesting discussion on production relations in Vijayanagar times. He suggests the relative importance of cultivation by tenant-cultivators and the use of slave labour on a limited scale.¹⁴ Stein has also raised the question of agrestic servitude.¹⁵

The following is the tentative picture of stratification in the agrarian relations from the king downwards:



The chief landholder was called *kāṇiyālar* in Tamil and *gaṇḍa-praje* in Kannada. The occupant cultivator was generally denoted by the term *kuḍi*. Under *mānya*, several service tenure holders like accountants may be included, besides, of course, the priestly class and temples. There is some clear evidence to say that the term *amaram* alone generally referred

to lower-level nāyakas and their holdings, though at times it denoted the superior level also. For the superior nāyakas the compound terms amara-nāyakatanam/amara-nāyankaram or just nāyakatanam/nāyankaram were used. The tenure *umbali* was mostly found in the context of lower-level nāyakas.

V

There is impressive evidence provided by foreign contemporaries like Nuniz and Paes to say that the Vijayanagar king could command the resources of the entire country under his rule. It is understood from an analysis of the revenue data in inscriptions that there were some structural changes going on in the revenue system over the three centuries in keeping with the political changes, that is, from the rule of official bureaucracy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to the rule of nāyakas in the sixteenth.¹⁶ In the earlier phase revenue was going to the respective rājya (chāvaḍi) headquarters. In the later nāyaka phase the direct revenue authority was the nāyaka in his nāyakatanam. A network of accountants (*karaṇikkam*) were involved in the assessment and collection of the taxes. Tax assessment was generally commuted in money terms (*varahan/pon* and *paṇam*). Commercial taxes were becoming more important now compared to pre-Vijayanagar times. The total money assessment, called *rekha*, of individual villages is mentioned in several inscriptions. There are, of course, some regional variations between the three linguistic regions and also within parts of the same region in keeping with local economic development.

One thing that is not yet directly verifiable from the above study is the proportion of revenue that was remitted by the nāyakas to the king. Another is the mode of collection. With regard to the king's power to collect revenue through the nāyakas, the contemporary account of Nuniz relating to the annual payment the nāyakas made to the king cannot be lightly ignored. That is also corroborated by the evidence of the *Rāyavāchakam* that refers to the detailed knowledge of the country's revenue available to the Vijayanagar king. That revenue flowed from the three great nāyakas of the Tamil area, namely, those of Senji, Tanjavur, and Madurai, even in the last decades of the sixteenth and the early decades of the seventeenth centuries when the empire was at its fag end, is attested to by Dutch and Jesuit sources.¹⁷

VI

In connection with the Vijayanagar local government frequent reference is made to the so-called *āyagār* system. The existence of this institution was first suggested by Venkataramanayya.¹⁸ Though he based his account on an eighteenth-century manuscript called *Aṭṭavana-tantram*, he asserted that the system was already there in full force during the time of the Kakatiya rule. In this system there are supposed to be a group of twelve village officials or servants who performed most functions of the village government that had earlier been looked after by the village bodies like the sabhā and ur. Actually, only three of the above twelve were somewhat 'officials', namely, the *karaṇam* (accountant), the *gaḍa/reḍḍi* (headman), and the *talāri* (watchman). The remaining members were just different artisans with the exception of the priest. These, of course, may have been useful to the economic functions of the local society and therefore they may be found in any pre-capitalistic society. The question is whether these services formed an 'official system' to be

found in Vijayanagar times. The term 'āyagār' is only rarely met with in Kannada inscriptions and is not found in Tamil inscriptions at all. It was Krishnaswami who actually created such a myth, by transposing the idea of Venkataramanayya to the Tamil area and attributing its introduction to the Vijayanagar rulers.¹⁹ He further asserted that the āyagār system, along with the nāyaka system, caused the demise of the earlier local institutions. Stein, believing Krishnaswami, added something more. For him it is not the existence of these āyagārs that is important; rather, it is the special allotments of income shares from land and specified cash payments for the first time generally provided to those holding these 'offices'. And 'the shift to this more formal, tenurial mode of payment underscores the transformation from the anonymous, organic agrarian relationships of the Chola period to the more stratified and complex relationships later'.²⁰ These inferences, though plausible, are not based on contemporary evidence.

VII

Multiplication of sub-castes was a striking feature of the society during Vijayanagar times. Another specific feature is the coming together of people speaking more than one language in several localities due to migrations. Though the four *varṇas* are loosely mentioned now and then, society cannot be described adequately by these theoretical categories. Even though Brahmans were highly respected in certain fields, they were despised in some other situations. The Brahmans themselves were stratified to a large extent, some enjoying parity with the rulers and some others occupying much lower positions. There were quite a few Brahmans right from the beginning of the Vijayanagar rule who were great scholars in Sanskrit and local languages, and held the highest offices in the government. Most of the important commentaries on the *Vedas* and allied works were made by the Brahman scholars of the times. According to N. Venkataramanayya, most of the commanders of forts (*durga-dannayaka*) were Brahmans. Though this statement is not statistically vouched for, some of the greatest nāyakas who served Krishnadevaraya and his successors were Brahmans. For instance, Salvanayque (*Saluva-nayaka* or *Virnarasingarayana-nāyaka* of inscriptions), who is mentioned by Nuniz as prime minister under Achyutaraya about 1535 and who as the lord of all the Tamil districts paid the largest annual tax or tribute to the king, was the son of a Brahman priest (*bhaṭṭa*) of Kanchipuram. On the contrary, the lowest section of the Brahmans were not a favoured lot. N. Venkataramanayya, who classifies them as 'eaters' quotes on this aspect both Nuniz and the *Āmuktamālyada*, a Telugu work supposed to have been written by the king Krishnadevaraya himself.²¹

Among the non-Brahman castes, the landholding groups (collectively called *kāṇiyālar*, *gauda-praje*, or *nāṭṭavar*) occupied a better position in the society and they tried to control the production system by commanding the services of not only the lower agricultural castes, but also the artisans and weavers. It seems they gradually lost their superiority to the nāyaka chiefs during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.²² In Tamil Nadu, particularly in the northern districts, we come across in several inscriptions the dual social divisions called the Right Hand and the Left Hand, which seem to have originated in the eleventh century. But unlike in the earlier centuries when they were a case of 'old landholding groups versus new landholding groups', now they were found to comprise all direct producers, both agricultural and non-agricultural. At times they formed a solidarity to oppose landlords along with the ruling class (*pradhāni* and military) when the rent and tax burden became unbearable. At this juncture they took on a class character. In spite of this solidarity, there

is found clear hierarchy among the component groups if we rank them according to the volume of the voluntary contribution they made to their common cult centres.

In one remarkable respect the Vijayanagar society was different from that of the preceding one. There was a proliferation of non-agricultural communities who were known in the Tamil areas as *paṭṭaḍai* (that is, the people of workshops or simply industrial people) or *kāsāyakudī* (those who pay taxes in money). It has been recognized by recent studies that the Vijayanagar period saw some remarkable development in industry, commerce, and urbanization. Vijaya Ramaswamy, tracing the weaving industry and society from the tenth to the seventeenth centuries, devotes two long chapters on the Vijayanagar times and provides information on the changes in the composition of the weaving community in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere, the spatial mobility of the weaving communities, the production of varieties of textiles to cater to both the luxury class and the general population, the exchange network both inland and foreign, and the striving of the weaving communities for a better social position in keeping with their rising economic position. The author also refers to the rise of master-weaver-cum-merchant.²³ Karashima's work has some related discussion on the economic and social position of the *kaikkōḷa* weavers and artisans (*kammāḷa*) vis-à-vis the dominant landholders (*nāṭṭavar*) of the localities in late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Tamil society.²⁴ The above would imply that the weaver and artisan communities were trying to become more and more independent of the domination of the landed class. There was considerable mobility among the weaving communities all over south India. There was also a conscious attempt on the part of the weavers and artisans to form a country-wise solidarity among themselves and seek a better social position in keeping with their rising economic strength.

It is widely recognized that the Vijayanagar times saw lots of migrations and demographic shifts. The exact course of migrations may be difficult to trace, but there are sporadic details in inscriptions and in later *vamsavali* accounts of several *pāḷayagār* families collected by Colin Mackenzie around 1800. The genealogies of most of the *pāḷayagār* families trace their origin to some *nāyaka* founder in the service of the Vijayanagar kings of the first half of the sixteenth century. An important avenue to social mobility was thus the political system itself. Several pastoral and even tribal communities of the dry districts of northern Karnataka and adjoining Andhra joined the growing military bandwagon of the Vijayanagar kings, and in course of time several of the military leaders rose to the status of *nāyakas* in the newly conquered areas. The *nāyaka* system cut across caste affiliations. As the *nāyaka*-ship (*nāyakatanam* or *nāyankaram*) was conferred by the king on the military leaders, any military adventurer could aspire for it.

With the growth of complex land system and tenurial arrangements, with the assertive emergence of non-agricultural producers, and with large-scale movements of people, society everywhere was bound to face tensions and conflicts. Such problems were either ignored or glossed over by scholars of previous generations. In recent works, however, some attention is paid to the social conflicts. A study of a revolt of Right Hand and Left Hand castes, referred to above, in a fairly wide area in Tamil Nadu during 1420s had highlighted the socio-economic confrontation between the direct producers on the one hand and the landlords (*kāṇiyāḷar*) and the ruling class (*rājagaram*) on the other.²⁵ There were sometimes conflicts among the Right Hand groups and among the members of the Left Hand group itself over the question of getting equal privileges. It is in this background that the advent of the *nāyaka* system in the later half of the fifteenth century becomes very much relevant. The *nāyakas* presented themselves as legitimate rulers by arbitrating the conflicts and by helping redress the grievances of the people of their respective localities.

As to the question how Vijayanagar society was integrated, Stein thought that the formal political and administrative structure generated as much fission as fusion, and rather stressed that the Hindu temple and Hindu sects created 'a kind of integration that provided a significant measure of identification with some meaningful whole for most people of the macro-region in Vijayanagar times'. This may be true of such big temple centres as Tirupati, Srirangam, Kanchipuram, and Srisailem, which attracted pilgrims from all over the macro-region. At the same time sectarian rivalries cannot be ignored. For instance, sectarian differences are found to be one prominent aspect of the above-mentioned Right Hand and Left Hand conflicts.

As pointed out in the beginning, pioneer historians stressed the fact that the basic cause for the warfare between the 'Hindu' Vijayanagar and the 'Muslim' Bahmani was religion.²⁶ The Vijayanagar state was created by the Sangama brothers, according to this view, to protect the Hindu dharma from the onslaughts of the Muslim religion. Quite a few recent critical studies have questioned this assumption.²⁷ Even the indigenous literature of the sixteenth century does not support the religious factor. Actually, the Hindu rulers tried to imitate the Muslim rulers politically and the Hindu elite culture adopted several Islamic elements. The Vijayanagar king took pride that he was the sultan among the Hindu kings (*himdurāya-suratrāna*). There were several Muslims within the territory of the Vijayanagar state living amicably with other communities, and Muslim soldiers were encouraged to join the army of the Hindu rulers.

VIII

Stein first conceptualized the Vijayanagar state as a segmentary state, as he did in the case of the Chola and other medieval states. In his latest writings, however, he has modified his views to a great extent.²⁸ He does not accept the concept of feudal state projected by Krishnaswami even though he accepts the highly militaristic nature of the Vijayanagar state stressed by Nilakanta Sastri earlier.²⁹ He now conceives it rather as a system of political economy pointing towards the patrimonial regimes that became familiar in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³⁰ Though there is still no generally accepted rigorous definition of the patrimonial state (originally formulated by Max Weber), Stein suggests some salient attributes as follows:

1. The ruler is essentially a military commander and an organizer of resources to sustain a large, standing military force;
2. There is major reliance on state income upon commerce and upon leaders of mercantile groups as adjuncts to state authority;
3. There is disjunction between state-level authority and an under-polity of local lordships, or chiefs, with considerable and legitimate autonomy from state-level administration, but subordinate to it.

According to Stein, Vijayanagar exhibited proto-patrimonialism. It was transitional in two ways to later, patrimonial regimes of Tipu Sultan or Peshwa Baji Rao. The first is that during the nearly three centuries of Vijayanagar rule, fundamental changes in agrarian and commercial production and organization provided the material base for the patrimonial systems that were to arise in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The deeply martial character of that society is the second way in which it parted from the medieval order, in which state income was partly realized through plunder, to one based upon a

more rational mobilization of landed wealth, regional and international. As the Vijayanagar kings remained ritual figures in too many ways to assume direct control of local resources, a fully patrimonial order could not be realized.

Karashima is rather inclined to regard the political economy of the Vijayanagar regime of the sixteenth century as feudal. As noted above, he thinks that state control over the *nāyakas* differentiated it to certain extent from the feudalism of western Europe. Drawing parallels from the Japanese feudal system, he would call it 'state feudalism'.³¹

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Stein gives a good survey of the Vijayanagar historiography, in addition to an annotated bibliography in Burton Stein, *The Cambridge History of India I.2: Vijayanagara* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990 [Indian edition by Orient Longman]). Also, Anna Libera Dallapicola and Stephanie Z. Lallémant (eds), *Vijayanagara—City and Empire: New Current of Research* (Wiesbaden: Frang Steiner Verlag, 1985), pp. 73–87; N. Karashima, *Towards a New Formation: South Indian Society under Vijayanagara Rule* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992) for detailed bibliographies.
- 2 The important works of the first phase are Henry Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara* (Madras: B.G. Paul, 1927); B.A. Saletore, *Social and Political Life in the Vijayanagara Empire 1346–1646* (Madras: 1934); N. Venkataramanayya, *Studies in the History of the Third Dynasty of Vijayanagara* (Madras: Madras University, 1935); K.A. Nilakanta Sastri and N. Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History* (3 vols.), (Madras: Madras University, 1946). For the next phase, A. Krishnaswami (Pillai), *The Tamil Country under Vijayanagara* (Annamalai: Annamalai University, 1964); K.V. Ramesh, *A History of South Kanara* (Dharwar: Karnataka University, 1970); A.V. Venkataratnam, *Local Government in the Vijayanagara Empire* (Mysore: University of Mysore, 1972); G.S. Dikshit (ed.), *Early Vijayanagara: Studies in its History and Culture (Proceedings of S. Srikantaya Centenary Seminar)* (Bangalore: B.M.S. Memorial Foundation, 1988).
- 3 For a critique of this aspect, Burton Stein, 'Vijayanagara and the Transition to Patrimonial Systems', in Dallepicola and Lallémant (eds), *Vijayanagara*.
- 4 The following quotation from P.B. Desai, *A History of Karnataka* (Dharwar: Karnataka University, 1970), p. 325, which is supposed to be a criticism of K.A. Nilkanata Sastri, *A History of South India from Prehistory to the Fall of Vijayanagara* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1966) is a typical argument:

Above all, it is an astounding perversion and fallacy to affirm that Harihara and Bukka were inspired by the example of the Telugu chiefs in their patriotic fervour and noble ideals to rescue Hinduism from the state of annihilation.
- 5 This is quite clear from the distribution of Telugu inscriptions in the districts of Anantapur, Kurnool, Cuddapah, and in the coastal areas further east.
- 6 This was, of course, the contention of the Karnataka school. The latest and fairly accurate account is that of Vasundara Filliozat, 'Hampe-Vijayanagara' in G.S. Dikshit, 1988, pp. 179–89.
- 7 K.V. Ramesh, 'Vijayanagara and Territorial Re-adjustments in Karnataka', *Kannada Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, no date, pp. 39–50; B.R. Gopal, *Vijayanagara Inscriptions* (vols. I–II) (Mysore: Department of Archaeology and Museums, 1985–86).
- 8 This is clear from the studies of Ramesh, *History of South Kanara*, pp. 259–60; Karashima, *Towards a New Formation* and to some extent that of Krishnaswami, *Tamil Country under Vijayanagara*, p. 194.
- 9 N. Venkataramanayya, *Third Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, p. 152.
- 10 Both the terms *nāyankaram* and *nāyakatanam* are used in two related senses: *nāyaka*-ship and the territory for the *nāyaka*-ship.
- 11 Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 396.
- 12 Karashima, *Towards a New Formation*.
- 13 Stein, *Peasant State and Society*.
- 14 Karashima, *Towards a New Formation*, p. 118.
- 15 Stein, *Cambridge History of India*, p. 100.
- 16 N. Karashima, *Towards a New Formation*, pp. 183–204.
- 17 Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subramaniam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in*

- Nāvaka Period Tamilnadu. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 105–7.
- 18 Venkataramanayya, *Third Dynasty of Vijayanagara*.
- 19 Krishnaswami, *Tamil Country under Vijayanagara*.
- 20 Stein, *Peasant State and Society*, pp. 424–5.
- 21 Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, pp. 356–7.
- 22 Karashima, *Towards a New Formation*.
- 23 Vijaya Ramaswamy, *Textiles and Weavers in Medieval South India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985).
- 24 Karashima, *Towards a New Formation*.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Sastri, *History of South India*.
- 27 Phillip B. Wagoner, 'Sultan among Hindu Kings: Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 55, no. 4, 1990, pp. 851–80; *ibid.*, 'Harihara, Bukka and Sultan', in David Gimartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (eds.), *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia* (Gainesville: Florida University Press, 2000), pp. 300–35.
- 28 Stein, *Cambridge History of India*, pp. 90–91.
- 29 Krishnaswami, *Tamil Country under Vijayanagara*.
- 30 Sastri, *History of South India*.
- 31 Stein was, however, not categorical in rejecting the feudal nature of the Vijayanagara polity as may be seen from the following eloquent passage in his *Cambridge History of India*, p. 78:

The domains of such chiefdoms never appear to have had definite boundaries. . . . [T]here are two important implications to be drawn from the dispersed character of political territories. One is that even the smallest chief could attempt to gain the protection of some distant great chief against another who might be closer. There appears to have been no conception of continuous territorial dominance at any level beyond certain ethnically defined cores, as a result of which great chiefdoms were mosaics of overlapping interests and hegemonies consisting of personal relations between some small magnate and a great one, and the durability of such relations could be fragile. The second implication stemming from this is that a conception of feudalism gains theoretical credibility. But there are still numerous reasons for rejecting the appropriateness of the feudal conception, among which the very high levels of exchange and commodity production is very important.

CHAPTER 5

The Mughal Empire

Irfan Habib

I

The Mughal empire dominates the political history of India during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It owed its formal foundation in 1526 to a cultured adventurer, the Timurid prince Bābur, of whom we know so much from his own memoirs. Bābur was driven away from his homeland Ferghana (now in Uzbekistan), but established himself at Kabul in 1504. After a long period of consolidating his rule in Afghanistan, he destroyed the Lodi empire by his victory at the battle of Panipat in 1526. He subsequently defeated a hostile confederacy under Rānā Sangram Singh of Mewar at Khanua in 1527. Bābur used artillery, including guns and muskets, to great effect in both these battles. His son Humayūn (reigned in India 1530–40, 1555–56) successfully met the challenge from Bahādur Shah of Gujarat (1526–37), but lost to the Afghan leader Sher Shāh Sūr, who drove him into exile after the battle of Kanauj in 1540.²

Sher Shāh (1540–45) succeeded in establishing an empire extending from the Salt Range to Bengal. He centralized administrative functioning, introduced the horse-branding system to enforce strict maintenance of cavalry, measured the land to have revenue assessed properly, enforced law and order with a heavy hand, and paid special attention to the security of routes. He reformed the coinage, instituting a system of *tri-metalism*, with coins minted in gold, silver, and copper; the silver *rūpiya* (rupee), originally of 178 grains Troy of practically pure silver, was his invention. His use of the local language ('Hindi') in administration was a measure of his practical sense. Though his nobility and troops consisted mainly of Afghans scolded in India, he made considerable efforts to win allies in other sections of the population. His work was largely continued by his successor Ismīl Shāh (1545–54), who, however, hastened the collapse of the Sūr empire by his constant conflict with influential Afghan nobles.³

Humāyūn who had returned from his exile in Iran to Afghanistan in 1546, invaded India in 1555. Though he died the following year, the last hopes of the Sūrs were extinguished at the second battle of Panipat (1556), where Mughal troops with Humāyūn's

young son Akbar, nominally at their head, decisively routed the Afghans commanded by 'Ādil Shāh Sūr's minister Hemū. From this point onwards the Mughal empire was set on its course of rapid expansion under Akbar (1556–1605).

From a mere glance at the chronology of military events in his reign, it would be obvious that Akbar was a great conqueror. Acquisition of control over Rajasthan was marked by the storming of Chittor (main fortress of Mewar) in 1568. The conquest of Gujarat followed in 1572–73 and then Bengal (1576), Kabul (1585), Kashmir (1586), Sind (1591), Orissa (1592), and Qandahar (1595). He succeeded in making the boundaries of his empire march along the Hindukush mountains, and thereafter he alternately threatened the Uzbeks and the Safavids.

In the last decade of his reign Akbar initiated an effort to expand into the Deccan. Berar was annexed in 1596, Ahmadnagar in 1600, and Khandesh in 1601. By the time he died (1605), the enterprise had run into some difficulty, particularly in the Ahmadnagar area, where a new leader, the Ethiopian commander Malik 'Ambar, was successful in organizing resistance.⁴

Akbar gave the Mughal empire its immensely systematic and centralized structure that contributed not a little to its success and relatively long duration.⁵ In 1574 he fused the nobility, bureaucracy, and military commanders into a single 'service' by assigning to each member of it a numerical rank (*manṣab*) from ten to 5000 and still higher numbers to indicate his status, salary, and size of military contingent. Theoretically, each officer could rise from the lowest to highest ranks or be assigned any duty or office without additional remuneration; and practically all offices, except the purely religious, were filled by holders of *manṣabs*. Promotions and demotions were henceforth made in terms of additions or reductions of *manṣabs*. Towards the close of Akbar's reign a second (*sawār*) rank was added to indicate the size of the cavalry contingent the rank-holder was expected to maintain.⁶

This systematization of state service greatly assisted Akbar's endeavour to enlarge the ethnic base of his nobility. At the beginning of his reign his nobility consisted mainly of Tūrānī (Central Asian) and Khurāsānī (Persian) nobles. From as early as 1561 he began to admit Rajput chiefs; subsequently they were allowed to hold their ancestral domains in lieu of salary due to them against their initial *manṣabs*. At the same time, members of the Hindu 'intellectual' and accountant castes were also promoted, a famous example being his finance minister Todar Mal. Indian Muslims too obtained high positions. But his effort to bring the nobles under close control, by taking away their *jāgīrs* (territorial assignments) and putting them on cash pay, along with strict branding and muster regulations, probably contributed to the very serious rebellion in 1580. Its suppression was accompanied by some concessions, notably, the restoration of the system of *jāgīrs*, which, however, still remained subject to regular transfer.⁷

The institution of *ṣūbas* or provinces into which the empire was divided in 1580 completed the process of systematization of central and provincial administration. The important feature of this organization was a multiplicity of chains of command emanating from the emperor. There were three important ministers at the centre, the *dīwān-i a'lā* (finance minister, also in control of assignment of *jāgīrs*), the *mīr bakhshī* (minister in charge of grant of *manṣabs*, postings, verification of contingents, and intelligence) and *ṣadr uṣ-ṣudūr* (in charge of revenue grants). They had their corresponding subordinates in the provinces (*dīwān*, *bakhshī*, and *ṣadr*) answerable directly to them, and not to the governor (*sipahsālār* or *nāẓim*) of the *ṣūba* (province), who was appointed by the emperor and reported directly to him. The *sarkārs*, into which each *ṣūba* was divided, often coincided with jurisdictions of *faujdārs* (commandants) and *karorīs* (imperial revenue collectors). An effort was made to establish

a fairly uniform system of local administration by having at the level of the pargana, or small sub-district, three semi-hereditary officers, the *qānūngo* (keeper of revenue records), the *chaudharī* (in charge of revenue collection), and the *qāzī* (judge). Persian was made the language of administration throughout, except for village accounts, for which local languages were used.

For purposes of revenue administration, the empire was divided into two kinds of territory: *khālīṣa sharīfa*, where the taxes were collected for the imperial treasury, and *jāgīrs*, where they were collected by mansab-holders in lieu of cash salary. The *jāgīrs* were regularly transferred, the assignments being made by use of officially established figures of expected net income, termed *naqdī* or *jamaʿ*. Much of the statistical endeavours of Akbar's administration were designed to work out realistic *jamaʿ* figures, ultimately arrived at in 1580–81 upon the basis of ten years' experience. The regulations by which land tax and other cesses were to be collected in the *khālīṣa* and *jāgīrs* were largely the same, and Akbar's administration strove to enlarge the area of measurement and fix cash revenue rates on each unit of area, varying with the crop.⁸

Akbar, though formally unlettered, was a man of diverse intellectual interests. From ideological influences traceable to Ibn Arabī's thought, he came to believe in the goal of *sulh-i kul*, 'absolute peace', which it was the duty of the sovereign to establish by tolerating different creeds and schools of thought. This provided rationalization for a policy he had already followed on empirical grounds, that of forming an ethnically composite nobility. The poll tax (*jizya*) on non-Muslims was abolished in 1564 and, finally, in 1580. Innovative practices like the *jharoka darshan* (the early morning public sight of the emperor) were now introduced with the object of broadening the acceptance of the empire as part of popular faith.⁹

Akbar had three fairly able successors in Jahāngīr (1605–27), Shāh Jahān (1628–58), and Aurangzeb (1659–1707), much as their characters varied. Under them the territorial expansion continued, though at a much reduced pace.

Jahāngīr found it hard to maintain the boundary in the Deccan that he had inherited, finding in Malik 'Ambar of Ahmadnagar (d.1626) a redoubtable opponent. But by 1636 the kingdom of Ahmadnagar was finally obliterated. In 1656–57, in two separate wars, considerable territory was seized from Golkonda and Bijapur. Under Aurangzeb, Bijapur was finally annexed in 1686, and Golkonda in 1687.

In the east, the territory of the present Bangladesh was thoroughly brought under control during Jahāngīr's reign. During the early years of Aurangzeb's reign, large parts of Assam were seized from the Ahom kingdom (1662–63) and Chittagong was taken from Araccan (1666).

It was only in Afghanistan that the Mughals failed to improve their position. Qandahar was lost to the Safavids (1622), recovered (1638), and finally lost (1649). Three costly campaigns (1649, 1652, and 1653) to drive out the Persians proved futile. In the north an ambitious expedition to seize northern Afghanistan (1646–47) from the Uzbeks was also unsuccessful.¹⁰

Akbar's three successors broadly maintained the principles of administration bequeathed by him. The system of centralized control continued and so did the mansab and jagir system, though with certain modifications and complex refinements.¹¹ Only towards the end of Aurangzeb's reign did a crisis develop owing to the grant of mansabs exceeding the capacity of jagirs to meet pay claims generated by them. The composite nature of the nobility was maintained, though the Iranian element, especially under Jahangir, whose politically influential queen, Nur Jahan (d.1645) was a Persian, gained in influence, while

the Rajputs lost some ground, though they remained important. Religious policy was seriously modified only by Aurangzeb, whose reimposition of the *jizya* in 1679 marked the culmination of earlier measures of religious discrimination. However, even Aurangzeb continued appointing Rajputs to high *manṣabs*, and under him the Marathas accounted for a sizeable number within the nobility.¹²

In the latter half of the seventeenth century, the rise of the Maratha chieftain Shivājī was to prove a portentous circumstance. Shivājī began to acquire independent power in western Maharashtra on the border of Mughal and Bijapur territories. The sack of Surat (1664) was followed by an enforced accommodation with the Mughals that proved abortive; and in 1674 Shivājī crowned himself at Raigarh. By the time he died (1680), he had carved for himself a kingdom comprising a long belt along the western coast and a detached portion in Tamil Nadu. He owed much of his success to his use of Maratha peasant-soldiers (*bargīs*). He established the system of *chauth* or quarter of the revenue exacted from the existing authorities as price of security from his attacks. Within his own kingdom (*swarājya*) he attempted to build regular administration modelled on that of the Deccan sultanates; taxation within it was by no means light.¹³

Shivājī's death saw a momentary eclipse of the polity he had founded, as his son Shambhujī was captured and executed by Aurangzeb (1689). His other son Rāja Rām (d.1700) became a fugitive when the Mughals overran the Maratha possessions in Tamil Nadu in the 1690s. There was a revival of Maratha power under the regency of Rāja Rām's widow Tārābāī, and large areas passed under the control of different bands of troops led by Maratha *sardārs* (chiefs), who enlarged their resources by a rigorous collection of *chauth*, failing which they subjected the territory to plunder. By the time Aurangzeb died, after having been in the Deccan continuously since 1681, much of his work lay in ruins as Maratha armies broke through the cordons of his troops again and again.

The decline of the Mughal empire is conventionally deemed to begin from Aurangzeb's death (1707), though symptoms of it, like agrarian disturbances and difficulties in *jāgīr* assignments, had become visible earlier. Aurangzeb's successors made certain concessions to reduce discontent. The *jizya* was abolished in 1713. The Mughals in 1707–8 released Shambhujī's son Sāhū (d.1748) to placate the Marathas; and the Rajput princes began to be given higher ranks and offered governorships. However, internal dissensions at the court mounted, intensified by armed conflicts between rival claimants at each succession. Muḥammad Shāh's reign (1719–48) saw a gradual loosening of central authority as governors increasingly became autonomous. This was especially the case with the viceroyalty of the Deccan, and the nazimates of Bengal and Awadh. Malpractices like tax-farming sapped the inner vitality of Mughal administration.¹⁴

Moreover, the passing away of the supremacy of mounted archers in the face of the rising potency of firearms made the Mughal *manṣab* system obsolete as a framework of military organization. The Marathas established their authority over Gujarat and Malwa (1737), although the emperor's nominal suzerainty continued to be acknowledged. Soon thereafter the empire was shattered by the Persian invasion under Nādir Shāh: Delhi was sacked and denuded of its treasures (1739), and the Mughal emperor had to cede all possessions beyond the Indus (*ṣūba* Kabul) together with Sind. In 1752, the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shāh Abdālī seized Punjab and Kashmir. The Rohila chiefs established themselves to the east of Delhi, and the Jats under their ruler Sūrajmal (1756–63) to the south. When the Marathas and the Afghans fought their battle at Panipat in 1761, the Mughal 'empire' had ceased even to be a buffer state.

II

There has been a debate for a long time, certainly since Bernier (travels, 1656–68), as to whether the Mughal empire was a state in the same sense as contemporary European states. Bernier believed that while European states had as their main function the protection of private property, in India, and indeed in Asia in general, the sovereign being himself the proprietor, the destruction of all private property appeared to be the chief function of the state. To this he attributed all the ills from which the Asian economies and societies suffered, notably the intense oppression committed by those whose own capacity to extort was only temporary, since it was derived from the sovereign who might deprive them of it any moment.¹⁵ Although the Mughal sovereign did not actually make the claim to universal landownership attributed to him by Bernier and others, the size of the land tax was indeed such as to absorb the larger part of the surplus. The practical result was that for tax collection purposes alone the state had to acquaint itself with conditions of agriculture in detail and attempt its improvement, a situation that had no parallel in contemporary European states, these tasks being performed there by the large estate owners. Marx, therefore, perceived in the Mughal empire a system of 'Asiatic despotism', based on tax rent, which was essentially different from the laissez-faire state principally because of its concern for protection of agriculture by irrigation and other means.¹⁶ Yet we must remember that outside the fiscal system the Mughal state interfered little with the structure of property rights subsisting on secondary claims to the agrarian surplus, or with urban property and commerce. Its legislative action was on a far more modest scale than that of Tudor parliaments, since the emperor did not profess to change religious or customary laws. Even in the famous and abortive *mahzar* of 1579 secured from prominent Muslim theologians by Akbar's court, only the right of interpretation of Islamic law was claimed for the 'just sovereign'.¹⁷ Only where the customary laws were in conflict with each other did the state enjoy discretion (thus the prohibition of cow slaughter in accordance with Hindu custom in certain areas under Akbar and Jahāngīr, and the imposition of *jizya* on Hindus in accordance with Muslim law by Aurangzeb). A notable exception was the prohibition of forcible *sati*, where simple humanity rather than any direct injunction of religion was the source of inspiration.¹⁸

There has recently been some questioning of the nature of the empire that the Mughals constructed. It has been suggested that there was a wide discrepancy between the nominal claims to authority and the actual exercise of power. Frank Perlin has argued that the real unit of political power was the *watan*, that is, presumably, zamīndārī right, while Andre Wink has asserted that all Indian polities, including the Mughal empire, were built essentially upon a system of mutual accommodation, for which he quaintly uses the term *fitna*.¹⁹ The crucial question here is the real magnitude of the land tax collected by the Mughals and inherited by the British. If this too was nominal, then, of course, Mughal claims to absolute power would have been nominal. But this has not at all been shown to be the case by anyone.²⁰ Accommodation and compromise are inescapable in any political system, howsoever 'totalitarian'. It would, indeed, appear that the Mughals succeeded in even systematizing and universalizing the space within which concessions could be given (for example, grants of manṣabs to chiefs, while demarcating the area held by them in zamīndārī). Others have urged a difference between the 'core' (supposedly the zone around the capital cities, Agra and Delhi) where imperial control was strong, and the 'periphery' where it tended to weaken and where regional groups arose within the nobility.²¹ There is little to support this, however. The jagīrs were as regularly transferred in Sind and Berar as in the Agra province; and individual manṣabdars too were shifted from one end of the empire to

another. Nor was the incidence of taxation different between the central and distant provinces. There is much wisdom in J.F. Richards's statement that 'the reality' of 'Mughal centralized power' is one matter; whether it was 'good or bad', quite another.²²

The question of the nature of the Mughal empire is linked in many ways to that of its decline. Its decline was simultaneous with that of the Ottoman empire, the Safavids, and the Uzbek khanate, with the Qing empire of China following a century later. If Barthold and Hodgson have been correct in ascribing the rise of these empires to gunpowder, one may argue that the further development and spread of firearms, and the increasing obsolescence of cavalry could be responsible for the loss of superiority by the imperial armies.²³ The rising economic strength of Europe might also have diverted trade and undermined the economic stability of these empires in ways that are yet to be studied. But there were some internal contradictions too within the political structure of the Mughal empire, which worked to undermine it once they could no longer be reconciled—and this might have reinforced the more general causes working towards its decline.

Two such conflicts could be identified as arising out of the structure of agrarian relations.²⁴ The first was between the Mughal ruling class and the zamīndārs. The former was part of the state apparatus of the empire and a major claimant to the 'tax rent'; the latter was a hereditary class possessing customary shares in the produce with a parallel claim to a share in the land tax. Both classes possessed armed power to reinforce their claims. Mughal imperial policy was directed in a large measure to keep the zamīndār class in an alliance based on a common exploitation of the peasantry, in which the zamīndārs could be used as instruments of tax collection. Concessions to them alternated with forcible measures to exact their obedience. Mughal religious policy can be seen, therefore, partly as a means to this end, the zamīndārs being the most important Hindu class to be either reconciled or repressed. The alliance between the two ruling classes was, however, unstable by nature; and the zamīndārs, given their armed power, naturally sought all opportunities that would enlarge their resources. Any weakening of Mughal power was therefore bound to result in a shift in the loyalty of zamīndārs. Further, if an agrarian crisis developed, and collection of land tax from an impoverished peasantry became more difficult, the zamīndārs were more likely to resist a full realization of the land tax since that would now be at the expense of their own share. Zamīndār uprisings in such circumstances became more frequent than before.

The second source of disturbance of the existing order came from the conflict between the imperial system and the peasantry. During Aurangzeb's early years (the 1660s) Bernier saw an increasing, relentless pressure upon the peasantry; Aurangzeb's *farmān* to Rasikdās (1666) draws a picture of declining agriculture and oppressive taxation; and the flight of peasantry from the land forms the context of the *farmān* to Muḥammad Hāshim (1668–69).

It is important to consider how far the uprisings that shook the Mughal empire in its later days had their roots in the two major 'contradictions' we have outlined. The Maratha revolt partook mostly of a zamīndār character in that its sardārs came from the class of local chieftains and hereditary potentates (*desāīs*, *deshmukhs*); and their two major exactions, the *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi*, had their origins in zamīndārī claims. Much of the failure of the Marathas to construct a centralized regime was due to this cause. But in recruiting the *bargīs*, the Marathas might well have been assisted by agrarian distress, owing to which 'the peasants, providing themselves with horses and arms, joined the Marathas'. The distress itself was accentuated by the rival demands of the Mughal *jāgīrdārs* and the Marathas.

In the Jat revolt near Agra, peasant uprisings seem to have coalesced into a caste revolt under zamīndār leadership. In other peasant revolts, religion rather than caste or zamīndār

leadership provided the unifying bond so necessary for gaining even limited success. Thus, the Satnāmīs, a community of peasants and petty traders, who raised a serious rebellion in Haryana in 1672, belonged to a fiercely monotheistic sect of the Kabīr movement. The Sikhs, who began a rebellion in Punjab under Gurū Gobind Singh (1676–1708), were in large part peasants (Jats), so that in 1709 their leader Banda was able to lead into the field ‘an innumerable army of men, like ants and locusts, belonging to the low castes of the Hindus and ready to die’. Here too a monotheistic religion bound the lowly rebels together. Unlike the Satnāmīs, the Sikhs were ultimately to triumph; whereupon their leaders, often of low-class origins, sought sometimes to become zamīndārs. Ranjit Singh, the great Sikh ruler of the Punjab (d.1839), assumed the title of maharaja, the acme of the ambitions of any Rajput prince.

While the tension between the empire and the zamīndārs has often been accepted for a fact, the argument of peasant resistance has frequently been questioned. M. Athar Ali denied that peasant defiance was the only effective check upon Mughal fiscal exactions, and Mukhia and Richards in effect enter similar denials.²⁵ This is an area where one’s reading of the evidence and selection of data may legitimately differ from another’s, and no conclusive discovery is likely to end the debate.

There is another social facet of the Mughal empire that has now been put forward to explain its decline. W.C. Smith, who was among the first to speak of peasant revolts against the Mughal empire, also argued that by its encouragement of commerce, the empire brought about a considerable growth of the ‘middle classes’.²⁶ This was subsequently reinforced by Iqtidar A. Khan.²⁷ From this arose the question of the importance of mercantile elements for the Mughal empire itself, and Karen Leonard opened the debate with an attempt to apply the ‘Great Firm’ theory to explain the decline of the Mughal empire. Incidentally, she linked banking firms with revenue farming, which came to dominate Mughal and Maratha administrations in the eighteenth century.²⁸ Bayly developed his conception of local ‘corporate groups’, which are supposed to have evolved within the apparatus of the Mughal empire, and included within them officials, townsmen, and merchants.²⁹ Subsequently, he and Subramaniam were led to speak of the rise of a ‘portfolio capitalism’ as a result of this marriage of classes and aspirations.³⁰ Since revenue farming (*ijāra*) was central to the assemblage of the ‘portfolios’ of rights that the ‘corporate groups’ sought, the next step has been to celebrate its dominance as a sign of ‘innovation’ and ‘progress’.³¹ Such ‘progress’ meant, it would seem, that financial control shifted to these ‘corporate groups’. The decisive moment arrived when these, as Karen Leonard argued, transferred for their own reasons their loyalties to the English East India Company. Here, then, we have the new concept of Plassey (1757), or the ‘Plassey Revolution’, that is now seen as the triumph of a coalition of the Company and local corporate groups, laying the basis for what Bayly has termed ‘the indigenous origins of the colonial economy’.³²

As we come to the end of the chain we have followed above, we are given a view of the British conquest that borders on fantasy.³³ There is much more reason still to contest the inferences drawn for the Mughal empire in this long line of argument. The relationship between revenue farming and commerce was extremely tenuous: it was inherent in the nature of revenue farming that the main beneficiary would be the state or the jāgīrdār, and the main victim the peasantry; and this was hardly a situation that would lead to ‘growth’ of any sort, let alone of commerce, in the long run. Indeed, there is no proof that Indian merchants were better off in the eighteenth century when Bayly’s groups triumphed than in the seventeenth when the empire was at its zenith. Certainly, routes were far more secure and the ravages of war far fewer in the earlier century. There is no evidence either

that mercantile groups deserted the Mughal empire when it still had authority. The shifts occurred only after such authority was lost: they were therefore not the causes, but the effects of loss of power. Sirājuddaula, we may remember, was betrayed only after Robert Clive had retaken Calcutta and established himself with full force there. There were no invitations or secret conspiracies when the English were at Falta. In other words, the mere fact that merchants were an important class in the Mughal empire does not mean that it was they who subverted it and brought about its decline.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Bābur's Turki text is now available in a critical edition by Eiji Mano (Kyoto, 1995). Despite some slips, both the old translations (Leyden-Erskine, revised by L. King [Oxford: 1921], and A.S. Beveridge [2 vols.] [London: 1921]) are still serviceable. Wheeler M. Thackston's readable translation (New York: 1996) is poorly annotated.
- 2 Rushbrook Williams, *An Empire Builder of the Sixteenth Century* (London: 1918) and Ishwari Prasad, *Life and Times of Humāyūn* (Bombay: 1956) are still the best studies of Bābur and Humāyūn from the point of view of political history.
- 3 For Sher Shah, the standard biography is K.R. Qanungo, *Sher Shah and his Times* (Bombay: 1965 [2nd edition]). Qanungo does not offer a study of Sher Shah's administrative measures. The omission is partly met in I.H. Siddiqui, *History of Sher Shah Sur* (Aligarh: 1971). The major source for Sher Shah is 'Abbas Sarwānī, *Tuhfa-i Akbar Shāhī* (published by S.M. Imamuddin as *Tārīkh-i Sher Shāhī*) (vol. I) (Dhaka: 1964).
- 4 Akbar's biographers have been many, besides, of course, his own minister, Abul Fazl, author of the *Akbarnāma* [(edited by Agha Ahmad Ali and Abd ur-Rahim) [3 vols] [Calcutta: 1873–87]]. The most detailed modern biography is A.L. Srivastava, *Akbar the Great* (3 vols) (Agra: 1962). See also V.A. Smith, *Akbar the Great Mughal* (Oxford: 1917); I.H. Qureshi, *Akbar, the Architect of the Mughal Empire* (Delhi: 1978). There is a very instructive collection of contemporary accounts of Akbar in Shireen Moosvi (tr.), *Episodes in the Life of Akbar* (New Delhi: 1994).
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- 6 Cf. Shireen Moosvi, 'The Evolution of the Manṣab System under Akbar until 1596–7', *JRAS* (Journal of Royal Asiatic Society, London), 1981, pp. 173–85.
- 7 The basic data for awards of manṣabs and their recipients are presented in M. Athar Ali, *The Apparatus of Empire: Awards of Ranks, Offices and Titles to the Mughal Nobility (1574–1658)* (Delhi: 1985). The introduction offers an excellent analysis of the material.
- 8 The fundamental work on Akbar's revenue measures was done by W.H. Moreland, especially his *Agrarian System of Moslem India* (Cambridge: 1929). The same ground is resurveyed in Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556–1707* (New Delhi: 1999 [2nd edition]), pp. 230–363.
- 9 On the evolution of Akbar's religious policy, Iqtidar Alam Khan, 'The Nobility under Akbar and the Development of his Religious Policy', *JRAS*, 1968, pp. 29–36, and, 'Akbar's Personality Traits and World Outlook: A Critical Appraisal', in Irfan Habib (ed.), *Akbar and his India* (New Delhi: 1997); M. Athar Ali, 'Akbar and Islam', in Milton Israel and N.K. Wagle (eds), *Islamic Society and Culture: Essays in Honour of Professor Aziz Ahmad* (New Delhi: 1983). Much valuable material is contained in S. Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Religious and Intellectual History of Muslims in Akbar's Reign* (New Delhi: 1975), setting the context in which Akbar's ideas evolved.
- 10 The reigns of Akbar's three successors are covered by exceptionally detailed official narratives, though Jahāngīr's *Tuzuk*, which can be treated as one of them, really stands as a class apart. The standard edition of the memoirs still is that of Saiyid Ahmad, Ghazipur and Aligarh, 1863–64. The other published chronicles are Abdul Hamid Lahori, *Pādshāhnāma* (edited by Kabir al-Din Ahmad, Abd al-Rahim and W.N. Lees) (Calcutta: 1866–72); Muḥammad Kāzim, *Ālamgīrnāma* (edited by Khadim Husain and Abdul Hai) (Calcutta:

- 1865–73). The three standard modern biographies are Beni Prasad, *History of Jahangir* (Allahabad: 1962 [5th edition]); B.P. Saksena, *History of Shah Jahan of Dihli* (Allahabad: 1958); Jadunath Sarkar, *A History of Aurangzeb* (5 vols), (Calcutta: 1912–24) with an abridged *Short History of Aurangzeb, 1618–1707* (Calcutta: 1954 [2nd edition]). Sarkar's work is very valuable for its reconstruction of events in the absence of the detailed official chronicles, which ceased with the closing of the *Ālamgīrnāma* in 1669.
- 11 These are studied in Irfan Habib, 'The Maṣab System, 1595–1637', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, XXIXth Session, Patiala, 1967, pp. 221–42, and, 'Mansab Salary Scales under Jahangir and Shahjahan', *Islamic Culture*, 1985, pp. 202–28.
 - 12 M. Athar Ali, *Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb* (Delhi: 1997 [2nd edition]) offers the best documented study of the subject.
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 - 16 Cf. Irfan Habib, 'Marx's Perception of India', *Essays on Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perception* (New Delhi: 1995), pp. 14–35.
 - 17 For the text of the *maḥẓar*, Nizāmuddīn Aḥmad, *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī* (edited by B. De) (vol. II) (Calcutta: 1913–35), pp. 344–6; 'Abdul Qādir Badāūnī, *Muntakhab ut-Tawārīkh* (edited by Ali, Ahmad and Lees) (Calcutta: 1864–69), pp. 270–72.
 - 18 Cf. Irfan Habib, 'Akbar and Social Inequities', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, LIII Session, Warangal, 1992–93, pp. 304–5.
 - 19 Frank Perlin, 'State Formation Reconsidered', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. XIX, no. 3, 1985, pp. 415–80; Andre Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India* (Cambridge: 1986). Both are undoubtedly influenced by Burton Stein's application of the theory of segmentary state to India in his *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (Delhi: 1980).
 - 20 For data on the size of land revenue, its assessment and collection in the Mughal empire, see Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, pp. 230–97.
 - 21 Cf. Chetan Singh, 'Centre and Periphery in the Mughal State: the case of Seventeenth Century Panjab', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. XXII, 1988, pp. 299–318. For a critique, M. Athar Ali, 'The Mughal Polity: a Critique of "Revisionist" Approaches', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. XXVII, 1993, pp. 699–710.
 - 22 J.F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: 1993), p. xv. One may refer here, in contrast, to Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subramaniam (eds), *The Mughal State, 1526–1750* (Delhi: 1998), in their introduction they repeatedly censure those who have spoken about centralization and the maṣab-jāgīr system, but do not spell out anywhere how in their opinion the Mughal empire is to be characterized.
 - 23 For 'the gunpowder-empire' thesis, V. Barthold, *Iran* (translated by G.K. Nariman, edited by S.H. Jhabvala) (Bombay: 1935), pp. 142–3; Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (vol. III: 'The Gunpowder Empires and Modern Times') (Chicago: 1974), pp. 17–27. Iqtidar Alam Khan raised the question of the political consequences of the dissemination of handguns in the Mughal empire in 'Nature of Handguns in Mughal India', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, LII session, New Delhi, 1991–92, pp. 378–89; *ibid.*, 'Socio-political Implications of the Dissemination of Handgun in Mughal India', *Citivithika*, vol. I, no.1, 1995–96, pp. 64–77.
 - 24 The four paragraphs that follow summarize what is argued in detail in Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, pp. 364–405, where full references would be found.
 - 25 Ali, *Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb*, pp. xiii–xiv, xxiv, 89–92; Harbans Mukhia, in his *Feudalism and Non-European Societies* (edited by T.J. Byres and H. Mukhia) (London: 1985), p. 275, has argued that 'a kind of equilibrium' existed and cases of peasant resistance were 'rare', though he does seem to make an exception for 'the peasant rebellions in Aurangzeb's reign'. J.F. Richards, while judicious in summing up the argument for an agrarian crisis during Aurangzeb's reign himself, rejects it very firmly (*The Mughal Empire*, pp. 291–2).
 - 26 W.C. Smith, 'The Mughal Empire and the Middle Classes', *Islamic Culture*, 1944, pp. 349–63. His article on 'Lower Class Uprisings in the Mughal Empire' was published in the same journal, 1946, pp. 21–40.
 - 27 Iqtidar A. Khan, 'Middle Classes in the Mughal Empire', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, XXXVI Session, Aligarh, 1975, pp. 113–41.

- 28 Karen Leonard, 'The "Great Firm" theory of the Decline of the Mughal Empire', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. XXI, 1979, pp. 151–67 on which J.F. Richards commented in the same journal, vol. XXIII, 1981, in 'Mughal State Finance and the Premodern World Economy', pp. 285–308, whereupon Leonard answered in the same volume: 'Indigenous Banking Firms in Mughal India: A Reply', pp. 309–13.
- 29 C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazzars: North Indian Society in the Age of Expansion, 1770–1870* (Cambridge: 1983), pp. 14–15 *passim*.
- 30 Sanjay Subramaniam and C.A. Bayly, 'Portfolio Capitalists and the Economy of Early Modern India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. XXV, no. 4, 1988, pp. 401–24.
- 31 Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707–48*, (Delhi: 1986), p. 318.
- 32 Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazzars*, p. 229.
- 33 A view of the British conquest that few would disagree with is set out in P.J. Marshall, 'Presidential Address to the Royal Historical Society' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. X, series 6, 2000, pp. 1–6. The issue is not over the existence of Indian collaborators, but over who provided the dominant force and whose interests principally prevailed.

CHAPTER 6

State Patronage in Medieval India

Iqtidar Alam Khan

Medieval Indian states always had a tendency to extend patronage to a large number of people outside the military-cum-bureaucratic ruling classes cornering the bulk of the available resources. Evidently, this patronage was aimed at mobilizing moral support for the ruling dispensations among the more vocal segments of the society, having cultural and ideological affinities with them. Jahangir's reference to the holders of revenue-free grants as 'the army of prayer (*lashkar-i dua*)' brings out clearly the role which the recipients of royal patronage were expected to play vis-à-vis the rulers.¹ In addition to cash rewards, stipends, and appointments to high positions carrying handsome payments not linked to any worthwhile military obligations, often the state patronage took the form of revenue-free grants of different types. The origins of this system of patronage distribution may be traced to three distinct traditions of governance, which together contributed to the formation of the medieval Indian monarchies in varying degrees.

The most important of these three was, of course, the Islamic tradition with its practice of sharing the *ghanimah* with the different sections of the Islamic community (*ummah*), including non-combatants who were needy and deserving.² In India the notion that the land conquered in *dar al-harab* was a part of the *ghanimah* gave rise to a supposition that a Muslim ruler in his capacity of the commander of the *ummah* was the custodian of the conquered lands and was competent to distribute some of these lands for the support of the *ulama* and the *mashaikh*, and the institutions run by them.³ Again, the Islamic tradition provides for the use of the amounts collected as *jizya* and *zakat* for the support of those 'deserving' and 'needy' among the Muslims. In the Delhi sultanate, initially, no distinction was made between *kharaj* and *jizya*. The revenue proceeds in the royal treasury were perceived equivalent to an amount collected as *jizya*.⁴ This in turn seems to have provided a justification for its use for the payment of stipends (*wazaiif*) and cash awards to theologians and mystics, a practice that continued in the succeeding regional sultanates as well as the Mughal empire.

Next to Islamic tradition, the distribution of patronage in medieval India was regulated by the notions of tribal and family obligations rooted in Turko-Mongol or Afghan

cultural milieus of the ruling groups dominating the Delhi sultanate and the Mughal empire, as well as the sultanates controlling particular regions at different points of time. This is borne out by financial considerations of a variety of types, including occasional bestowal of inam or *altun-tamgha* grants on the members of the ruling elite not rendering military or any other kind of service to the state. It is noteworthy that claims of the recipients of such considerations did not have any religious sanction, but rested entirely on the notions defining the cultural ethos of the ruling groups in particular polities. Balban's allowing himself to be persuaded by the *kotwal* of Delhi, Fakhr al-Din, to virtually treat the iqtas of the deceased troopers as the inam lands inherited by their descendants is, perhaps, the earliest instance of the patronage of this nature that one comes across in the Delhi sultanate.⁵ Babur's sending, in 1526, of valuable presents (*saughat*) to his relations in Samarqand, Khurasan, Kashghar, and Iraq, and one *sharukhi* for every inhabitant of Kabul and Varsak (in Badakhshan),⁶ and the grant of *altun-tamgha* jagirs (permanent assignments) by Jahangir,⁷ may be cited as instances of similar patronage from the Mughal period.

The third important influence discernible in the pattern of state patronage in medieval India was that of the 'Hindu' or ancient Indian tradition identified with the *brahmadeya* and *devadeya* land grants. These grants carried with them administrative and judicial functions that would continue in the line of the original grantees indefinitely. The emergence of local magnates with 'feudal' features in the Indian states of the period from 700 to 1200 is often ascribed to this system of grants.⁸ Apparently, such grants continued to be given, though on a much smaller scale, in the Vijayanagara empire and the Rajput chieftainships of Marwar and Mewar during the medieval period. The *manya* plots or villages reserved in Vijayanagara for the support of Brahmans, temples, *maths*, and village servants (*ayagars*) and inam lands as perquisites to hereditary officers such as *deshmukh* and *deshpandes* in the Deccan states, and under Shivaji are some of the examples.⁹ Additionally, grants made by the zamindars in the Mughal empire to Brahmans or for support of temples, variously termed in Yasin's eighteenth-century glossary of revenue terms as *pirpal* and *bishnparit*, also deserve to be remembered.¹⁰ That sometimes this tradition also contributed to shaping the forms of state patronage in the Delhi sultanate is borne out by Abu'l Fazl's statement in the *A'in-i Akbari*, suggesting that down to the early years of Akbar's reign the *chaudharis*, a particular set of hereditary authorities, were rewarded by revenue-free grants. The grants of the *chaudharis* were abolished along with those of the Afghan dignitaries by Akbar in the 1560s.¹¹ That some of the Hindu dignitaries continued to be remunerated for their piety or active cooperation with the administration down to the times of Sikandar Lodi and Sher Shah by revenue-free (inam) grants is borne out by other surviving evidence.¹²

In the Delhi sultanate the earliest references to revenue-free grants meant for providing financial support to Muslim scholars and institutions date back to the second half of the thirteenth century. But these are the instances of grants made by high nobles (one of them being Balban before his rise to kingship) in their iqtas.¹³ The references to proper grants for support of Muslim scholars made under the authority of the sultan became frequent only from the time of the Tughluq dynasty (1320–1388). There are, for example, copious references in the *Insha-i Mahru* to such grants as *milk*, *idrar*, and inam, located in the province of Multan. Other sources of the period also refer to *awqaf* (plural of *waqf*) represented by similar grants made for supporting institutions like mosques, madrassas, or *khanqahs*. Half of these grants were made in uncultivated lands so that the *muqti's* own revenues were not greatly reduced. Ordinarily, the grants were neither transferable nor resumable, but the sultan had the right to cancel them. A classic example of the exercise of the sultan's authority to this effect was 'Ala al-Din's transferring to the *khalisa* all the lands

held by grantees as milk, inam, or waqf. Firoz Tughluq's (1351-87) restoration of lands falling under the grants resumed by his predecessors again testified that in the Delhi sultanate the final authority in matters relating to the land grants rested with the sultan, but it also indicates that the resumption of grants was not considered compatible with the spirit of Islamic piety.¹⁴

The theoretical uncertainty about the nature of grantees' rights on lands given to them by the sultans as revenue-free grants seems to have stemmed from two contradictory views that existed among the Islamic jurists on the question as to what was the nature of rights on land of the non-Muslim peasants and hereditary chiefs of different categories in the territories conquered by the Muslim ruling groups in India. One view was that rights of earlier proprietors ceased with conquest, and therefore all the lands controlled by the sultans in India belonged to the Islamic community. Grants made by the sultans in their capacities of the deputies of the caliph would bestow ownership rights on the grantees which could neither be terminated nor transferred from one place to another. This land would be inherited by the descendants of the original grantees in accordance with the shares prescribed by the sharia. It was obviously a view that reflected the aspirations of grantees. Opposed to this view, there was another more practical view, favoured in the Delhi sultanate by the ruling groups and the ulama closely associated with them, which treated the rights of the men controlling or using land from before the Islamic conquest as intact as long as they continued to pay revenues (*khiraj-o jizya*) to the sultan. A land grant made by the sultan, according to this view, amounted only to authorizing the grantee to collect revenue from a piece of land and use it for his sustenance. Such a grant was required to be confirmed by the succeeding rulers and succession to a grant was to be regulated by the order of the sultan rather than the rules of the sharia.¹⁵

Ample evidence is available to suggest that in the Delhi sultanate the authorities never conceded the grantees being proprietors of lands covered by their grants. That is why no serious attempt was ever made to realize 'ushr (one-tenth of produce on land owned by a Muslim) from them. The imposition of 'ushr on the grantees during Sikandar Lodi's reign was an aberration. Periodic assessments of the value of the grants and the insistence of the authorities that succession to them must always be subject to confirmation by the sultan go to show that grantees were not allowed the security of tenure that goes with the concept of proprietorship.

It is, of course, true that during the time of the Lodi dynasty the idea that grantees were the proprietors of lands covered by their grants was propagated forcefully by an influential section of the Islamic clerics. Although there is nothing on record indicating that such a position was formally conceded by the state authorities, there does exist evidence testifying to a tendency on the part of revenue staff in the Lodi empire to sometimes demand 'ushr from the grantees. Possibly, this demand pertained to the parts of the grants originally comprising uncultivated (*banjar uftada*) land on which the rights other than those of the grantees were not fully established. After the establishment of Mughal rule in Hindustan (1526), the tendency to demand 'ushr from the grantees was initially discouraged by Babur, but sometime around 1528 he appears to have reverted to the Lodi practice in a more formal manner. This elicited a strong protest from Shaikh 'Abdul Quddus Gangohi, a prominent Sufi who was Babur's contemporary. He accused Babur of trying to solve his financial difficulties at the cost of the grantees. But this protest did not persuade Babur to change his policy. Possibly, the Mughal revenue authorities continued to demand 'ushr from the grantees down to the early years of Humayun's reign.¹⁶

At this point it may be noted that by formally levying 'ushr on the produce of land given as grants, Babur had practically conceded the long-standing aspiration of the grantees to be

recognized as the proprietors of land covered by their grants. Strong protest from the grantees (*aimma*) over this measure, however, indicated that they were not agreeable to accepting the financial obligations that accompanied proprietorship of land in the Islamic framework.

The system of revenue-free grants appear to have undergone a drastic overhaul during Akbar's reign (1556–1605). The most significant of these changes was the attempt to delink them from the theoretical underpinnings mentioned above. While reducing, resuming, and transferring from one place to another the revenue-free grants at different points of time during Akbar's reign, no heed was paid to the nature of rights the *fiqh* allowed to the grantees. As is evident from the *Tahqiq-i Araz-i Hind* written by Jalal al-Din Thaneshari (d. 1581–82), sections of the *aimma* did try to argue with reference to *fiqh* literature that their rights on the land covered by grants were proprietary in nature, but they were totally ignored. Badauni summarizes the general resentment of the *aimma* over Akbar's policy with regard to grants in his crisp comment on the revolt of the nobles in 1580. 'The *aimma* said that the king disturbed our *madad-i maash* lands and God Almighty disturbed his empire.'¹⁷ Some of them in sarkar Sirhind (suba Delhi) who tried to show their sullen mood on this issue in 1585 by not coming to pay customary respects to the emperor then passing through the territory are reported to have been threatened with the resumption of their grants. This was sufficient to force most of them to retract their protest without demur.¹⁸ The attempt obviously was to reduce them really to the position of 'the army of prayer', which like the real army was conceived as consisting of persons belonging to different faiths and creeds united together in their loyalty and devotion to the person of the emperor.

In this context, it is of interest to note that, from Akbar's time onwards down to Aurangzeb's order of 1672–73, resuming the grants of non-Muslims,¹⁹ the non-Muslims were not debarred from receiving proper grants. In the earlier regimes as well sometimes financial support in the form of land grants was provided to non-Muslims. But this was done, in all likelihood, outside the proper system of state patronage meant for providing financial support mainly to Muslim scholars and was managed by *diwan-i sadarat*. For example, in the Delhi sultanate, a large number of grants termed as *inam* were held by the *chaudharis* (mostly Hindus) in return for their role in the local administration, as also by the retired soldiers and their descendants for past services and links with the ruling groups. Abu'l Fazl's statement that the '*suyurghals*' of the 'Afghans and *chaudharis*' were converted into '*khalisa*' during the *sadarat* of Shaikh 'Abd al-Nabi goes to suggest the existence of a large number of such grants prior to the establishment of Mughal rule in north India.²⁰ The use of the term '*suyurghal*' in this statement is, perhaps, indicative of Abu'l Fazl's attempt to conform to the spirit of Akbar's policy of not making a distinction between the religious and non-religious grants. Ziya Barani's use of the term '*inam*' for the lands held by demobilized troopers²¹ as well as for the land-grants given in the Bahmani kingdoms to *deshmukhs* and *deshpandes*²² suggest that prior to Akbar the standard term for non-religious grants was *inam*. In all probability, like the *inam*, *altun-tamgha* grants of the later Mughal period were not managed by the *diwan-i sadarat*; the distribution of such non-religious grants was perhaps the concern of the *diwan-i wazarat*.²³ In the very beginning of Akbar's reign, this distinction between the grants made from a secular premise (which at times also covered non-Muslims) and those exclusively meant to support Muslim divines was sought to be obliterated. The grants created for the support of non-Muslim priests or the deities looked after by them came to be treated at par with those given to Muslims. Both were routed through the *diwan-i sadarat*. In the early years of Akbar's reign, the former

were often proposed by prominent Hindu nobles and were still termed as inam grants. But with the passage of time this distinction also tended to disappear. The grants given to non-Muslims or meant for the maintenance of temples also came to be termed *madad-i ma'ash* grants. These were often proposed by Muslim dignitaries.²⁴

Another new feature introduced in the system of grants by Akbar was his policy of intervening in the management of *awqaf*, that is, grants made for the support of religious establishments. This is reflected in Akbar's appointing in 1575 a man of his choice to the position of *mutawalli* (administrator of the trust) to manage the income from the large grant that he had created for the support of the mystic establishment connected with the tomb of Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti at Ajmer.²⁵ The attempt obviously was to regulate the affairs of the Chishti dargah so that its influence among common people, particularly Indian Muslims, was used to promote goodwill and loyalty for the emerging Mughal imperial authority. A similar impression is created by Akbar's order of 1568 to the effect that offerings to the idols at the Madan Mohan temple at Brindavan would be managed by a priest of his choice, Jiu Gosain. It is noteworthy that Akbar assumed the authority to appoint the recipient of the offerings at this temple after having created an inam grant for the support of its chief priest Gopaldas three years earlier.²⁶ Such an attitude of using the leverage of grants for prompting influential religious establishments to promote goodwill for the ruling establishments was not so clearly discernible before Akbar. But after Akbar it seems to have persisted as a regular feature of the Mughal system of distributing patronage down to Aurangzeb's time.²⁷

As is evident from surviving documents, lands given as *madad-i ma'ash* to non-Muslims by Akbar, Jahangir, Shahjahan, and during the first seventeen years of Aurangzeb, all put together, were not at all a negligible part of the total patronage. All these grants to non-Muslims were made out of the revenues spared for distribution among the 'deserving' by the *diwan-i sadarat*. The total quantum of the revenues of this category in Akbar's provinces, excepting Delhi and Agra, was less than 5 per cent of the total; in subas Lahore and Gujarat it was less than 2 per cent. The revenues spared by Akbar for grants were, apparently, much less than its quantum (5.33 per cent) under Firoz Shah Tughluq.²⁸ It was possibly a result of Akbar's curtailing the grants of Muslim clerics continuing from the earlier regimes. This situation led to a general feeling among the Muslim clergy that the non-Muslim divines and religious institutions were being rewarded by depriving them of a part of patronage that was hitherto monopolized by them. Much of the resentment of orthodox Muslim divines against Akbar, made manifest in the writings of 'Abd ul-Qadir Badauni and Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, may be explained with reference to their grievance on this count. Jahangir tried to pacify these feelings by becoming less stringent in the distribution of *madad-i ma'ash* grants. But the doctrinaire objection that in a state where Islam was the ruling idea, non-believers were not entitled to state patronage, was not met. It was this section of the orthodox ulama who were sought to be placated by Aurangzeb's order of 1673 resuming the grants held by non-Muslims.²⁹ It is doubtful that this order was enforced all over the empire rigorously. In a few cases the resumption of non-Muslims' grants is testified by documentary evidence, but it is known that many of the grants given to the non-Muslims till then continued to be held by them undisturbed. This order of Aurangzeb was totally disregarded by his successors. The later Mughals, and successor states in different parts of the country, including those of Awadh, Bengal, Hyderabad, and Mysore, continued to broadly adhere in this respect to the policy laid down by Akbar.

Akbar's decision not to make a distinction between Muslim divines and non-Muslim religious figures in the distribution of state patronage appears to have assumed new

ideological undertones by the time the *A'in-i Akbari* was compiled (1595). A statement on *A'in-i Suyurghal* to the effect that 'the post of *sadr* is entrusted by the Emperor to a person whose character and speech always reflect the light of *sulh-i kul*' points in this direction. This statement combined with the religious tenor of the section defining the four categories of persons deserving state patronage go to clearly indicate a new ideological basis of the policy with regard to *madad-i ma'ash* grants. Akbar thus set a model that was followed, by and large, not only by his successors, but also by many of the Hindu and Muslim nobles and the hereditary chiefs in the Mughal empire.³⁰ Aurangzeb's attempt to reverse this situation was not successful. On the whole, the spirit of *sulh-i kul* informed the distribution of state patronage during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries all over the subcontinent. Even the non-Muslim powers that had emerged on the scene after a bitter struggle against the Mughal imperial authority were not averse to providing state patronage to Muslim priests and mosques situated in the territories controlled by them. The financial assistance routinely provided by the Maratha state for the upkeep of mosques located in the *swaraj* territory during the eighteenth century may be gauged from the surviving sanad dated 1746–47 establishing a grant of one and a half *bigha* of land for the expenses on account of *chiraghbatti* and other services of a newly built mosque at the village Mahagiri in qasba Thana.³¹

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri* (edited by Saiyid Ahmad) (Ghazipur and Aligarh: 1863–64), p.5.
- 2 Qudama bin Jafar's *Kitab al-Kharaj* (translated by A. Ben Shemesh as *Taxation in Islam*) (Leiden: 1965), vol. II, p.24.
- 3 Jalal al-Din Thanesari (d.1581–82), *Tahqiq-i Arazi-i Hind* (Arabic) (translated to Urdu by Sa'id Ashraf Nadvi) (Karachi: 1963).
- 4 Cf. Irfan Habib, *The Cambridge Economic History of India* (edited by Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib) (Cambridge: 1982), vol. I, p.67.
- 5 Cf. Ziya Barani, *Tarikh-i Firozshahi* (edited by Shaikh Abdur Rashid) (Aligarh: 1957), p.73; H.M. Elliot and John Dowson, *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians* (London: 1867–77), vol. III, p.108: it is stated that the retired troopers and their heirs assumed that the lands held by them in the *doab* were their inam grants.
- 6 A.S. Beveridge, *Babur-nama in English* (London: 1969 [reprint]), p.522–3.
- 7 Cf. Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* ([New Delhi: Oxford University Press], 1999 [2nd revised edition]), p.302 and n.17.
- 8 Cf. R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism c. AD 300–1200* (Madras: 1980), pp.3–5, 126–69.
- 9 Burton Stein and H. Fukazawa, *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. I, pp.111–12, 196, 200, 250–51.
- 10 Cf. Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, p. 363 and nn. 95, 96.
- 11 *A'in-i Akbari* (Nawal Kishore, 1893), vol. I, p. 140.
- 12 Cf. I.H. Siddiqui, 'Wajh-i ma'ash grants under the Afghan kings (1451–55)', in *Medieval India: A Miscellany*, (Aligarh: 1972), vol. II, pp. 36–7.
- 13 Habib, *Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. I, p. 76.
- 14 Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (Cambridge: 1999), p. 315; Habib, *ibid.*, pp. 75–6.
- 15 These contending views of the jurists on the nature of land rights in India are clearly reflected in Jalal al-Din Thanesari's *Tahqiq-i Arazi-i Hind*, compiled in the 1570s. Iqtidar Alam Khan, 'Shaikh Abdul Quddus Gangohi's Relations with Political Authorities: in A Reappraisal', *Medieval India: A Miscellany* (Aligarh: 1977), vol. IV, pp. 84–5, 90.
- 16 Cf. Khan, *ibid.*, pp. 85–6, 89.
- 17 Abdul Qadir Badauni, *Muntakhab ut-Tawarikh* (edited by Ahmad Ali and Lees) (Calcutta: 1864–69), vol. II, p. 276.

- 18 Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, p. 356, n. 64.
- 19 Ibid., p.357 n.67. Aurangzeb's order resuming non-Muslims' grants is recorded in 'Ali Muhammad Khan's *Mir'at-i Ahmadi* (Baroda: 1927-28), vol. I, p. 288.
- 20 Cf. *A'in-i Akbari*, vol. I, p. 140.
- 21 Barani, *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*, p. 73.
- 22 Stein and Fukazawa, *Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. I, p. 196.
- 23 Compare a farman of Bahadur Shah of the year 1710 conferring the inam-i al-tamgha grant, cited by Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, p.358, n.71. This farman 'takes care to state the *hasil* (revenue) of the village granted, a detail usually missing in *madad-i ma'ash* grants' made through the diwan-i sadarat.
- 24 Tarapad Mukherjee and Irfan Habib, 'Akbar and the Temples of Mathura and its Environs', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, XLVIII Session, Goa, 1987, Delhi, 1988, pp. 237-8; B.N. Goswamy and J.S. Grewal, *The Mughals and the Jogis of Jhakbar* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1967), pp. 20-24. It is argued persuasively that, as indicated by the grants made to the Jogis of Jhakbar, the term *madad-i ma'ash* came to be used also for the grants given to non-Muslims from Akbar's time onwards.
- 25 Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, p.359.
- 26 Mukherjee and Habib, 'Akbar and the Temples of Mathura', p. 237.
- 27 Cf. Saiyid Zaheer Husain Jafri, *Studies in the Anatomy of a Transformation: Awadh from Mughal to Colonial Rule* (New Delhi; 1998), p. 88. With reference to the documents (earliest dated 1676) surviving at a khanqah at Salon, Rae Barielly, it is stated that the offices of *sajjada-nashin* and *mutawalli* rested in one person. The successor to this position could be chosen from amongst the sons, relatives, devotees, and even strangers. But such a nomination was to be always communicated to the Mughal emperor.
- 28 Cf. Habib, *Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. I, pp. 76, 243; Ibid., *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, p. 360.
- 29 Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, pp. 356-7.
- 30 Ibid., pp. 356, n. 66, 363. Reference to *madad-i ma'ash* grants created by Raja Anirudh Singh of Bundi in 1689-90 for the support of the Chisti khanqah at Ajmer is of special interest. He created this grant in spite of Aurangzeb's religious bigotry reflected by his order of 1673, resuming the grants of the non-Muslims.
- 31 *Selections from the Satara Raja's and Peshwa's Diaries*, G.C. Vad (ed.), vol. II, Poona, 1906, document no. 171, p. 101.

CHAPTER 7

Social Change in Medieval India

Satish Chandra

The concept that Indian society was an unchanging one, and that major changes came only with the coming of the British, has now been largely discarded, though there is continued discussion about the nature of the 'classical' Indian society, its phases of evolution, and the precise nature of what has been called 'Indian feudalism'. The processes of the incorporation of this society into the world capitalist economy, its conversion into a colonial one, and the nature of the foreign and domestic forces at work are also under discussion.

I

The notion that the establishment of a Turkish state in north India during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was only a surface phenomenon that did not have any effect on the structure of society, or introduced any new social and political norms, is no longer accepted. It has been shown that Turkish centralization, which was based on the concentration of a large share of the rural surplus in the hands of a city-based elite, using the administrative device of the *iqṭādārī* system, maintenance of large standing armies, and introduction of new scientific devices like the Persian wheel based on the noria, the spinning wheel, and the carder's bow, increased agricultural production in significant areas, and also led to the growth of the manufacture of cloth, metallurgical products, paper, etc.¹ All these resulted in significant socio-economic changes leading to growth of towns, both old and new, many of which became administrative centres and centres of artisanal production, leading in turn to an expansion of the commercial and artisanal sectors. At the same time, there was increase in the power of the city-based elite vis-à-vis the rural elite, the latter being based on clan/caste support in the rural areas, and a military force, including *garhis* (forts).

The growth of central control over the rural elites was a slow process that continued well into the colonial period when the zamīndārs and the general populace were disarmed. During medieval times, the core of the process of centralization of authority consisted of

replacing autonomous *rajas* by zamīndārs who paid/collected land revenue on the basis of a centrally fixed schedule. The highlight of this system was the *zabtī* system devised under Akbar when all the land was supposed to be measured, and the land revenue fixed (and often paid) in cash on the basis of fertility, nature of the crops sown, and the like. This was also accompanied by a state-led programme of extending cultivation, and replacing low-grade crops by superior or so-called cash crops. This policy has to be seen in the context of institutional, social, and political restraints, as also the practical working of the system. The processes of social change reached a climax during the seventeenth century. It continued apace during the eighteenth century despite serious setbacks following the British control over Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa after 1757, and their domination of the Tamil and Coromandal coasts.

II

Fernand Braudel observed that in India 'a self-sufficient village, producing its own food and cloth and self-absorbed was an exception', and that 'as a rule, the village community was open to the outside world, subject to various authorities and to the markets which watched it closely, emptied it of its surpluses and forced upon it the conveniences and dangers of a money economy'.² The rise of towns has thus to be seen not as an isolated phenomenon, but as part of a wider process in which not only an increasing proportion of the population began to live in towns (including village-towns or qasbas), but an increasing number of villages were integrated into a wider network, which subtly affected the pattern and structure of village life. This is brought out by Tavernier in the middle of the seventeenth century: 'In India a village must be very small indeed if it has not a money-changer, called a shroff.' He notes further that 'even in the smallest villages rice, floor, butter, milk, beans, and other vegetables, sugar and other sweetmeats, dry and liquid, can be procured in abundance.'³ While Tavernier's observations would be more true of villages along the trunk routes, the expansion of the road network from these main routes is significant.⁴

Individual ownership of land by peasants, growth of a money economy, and the impact of administrative measures (fixing land revenue in cash, the cash basis of the *jāgīrdārī* system), and natural calamities such as famines accentuated the process of social segmentation in village society. On the one hand, there was a mass of indigents, some of whom were property-less persons, and on the other the growth of a rich, relatively prosperous section. The richer sections were not only the zamīndārs and village headmen (*muqaddam*, *chaudharī*, etc.), but a section of peasants who had considerable landholding and an abundance of means of production such as ploughs, bullocks, wells, etc.⁵ These men have been called *kalāntarān-i deh* or *halmīrs* in the Persian administrative manuals and documents.⁶ A common term in Rajasthan seems to have been *mahājan* (literally 'great men' or men of status). The word 'mahājan', like the word *banya*, is used functionally as well as in terms of caste. Thus, *mahājan* broadly belonged to the caste of *banya*, but both the words could be applied to anyone who lent money or traded in commodities.⁷ In a similar case, *banjārās* were an itinerant caste, but anyone who carried on the task of transporting bulk commodities and goods, leading caravans of bullocks or a *tāndā*, was also a *banjārā*. Thus, Mulla Daud in the fourteenth century, refers to a Brahman who led *tāndās* from Puri in Orissa to Govar in east Uttar Pradesh.⁸

Mahājan or the *kalāntarān* should also be distinguished from the *riyayati* or concession holders. The term *riyayati* was applied in Rajasthan to local village officials as well to

those belonging to high castes, the Brahmans and the Rajputs who, in practice, might hold only small plots of land and pay land revenue at a concessional rate, sometimes only one-fourth in place of the normal one-third, two-fifths or half.⁹ In a manner of speaking, this was a variation of *sāsan* or *inām* or rent-free land given for religious or scholarly purposes. The *kalāntarān* would, in all probability, be the resident-cultivators—the *thānī* (Sanskrit *sthanik*) of Maharashtra, or the *gharū-halā* of Rajasthan. They were called *khud-kāsh*t in the Persian terminology of the times. The privileged position of these sections and their role in the village appears to have been defined by a number of scholars.¹⁰ At the other end of the spectrum were the indigent, the landless, and the artisans. These sections included the *dalits* or 'untouchables' who were generally not allowed to own land, and formed the reserved force of landless labourers needed for the agricultural purposes of the richer sections. In Rajasthan they were called *kamīn* or *paltī*.¹¹

It is difficult to decide on the basis of our sources whether these sections—the rich, the poor, and the middling—were more or less static, or whether segmentation implied accretion at both ends of the scale, with the rich adding to their resources, and the poor and the landless increasing in numbers. Information drawn from eastern Rajasthan suggests that by the seventeenth century the process had advanced considerably in some areas. Thus, in one document we find that out of 200 *āsāmīs*, sixty-one (30.5 per cent) had one ox each; 129 (64 per cent) had two to four oxen each, and ten (5 per cent) had more than four oxen each.¹² In another village (*mauza*), Kotkhawada, the percentage of these three categories respectively was 21.5, 69.2, and 8.8.¹³

Village segmentation is also brought out by some studies relating to eastern Rajasthan with reference to the number of ploughs held by individual cultivators. The table given below shows the three categories of ploughs and the percentage of *āsāmīs* in each category.

TABLE 1. Yād-dāshtī Hal Pargana Chala Kalan vs 1722/1665–66

	0.5–1	%	1.5–2	%	2 or more	%	Total
Multan	26	68.42	8	21.0	4	10.5	38
Ramsee	24	55.86	12	27.9	7	16.2	43
Sarkar Rewari (94 villages)	2107	79.65	524	19.05	14	0.52	2645
Kotla (49 villages)	473	57.54	273	33.21	76	9.24	822

While there are considerable variations from village to village and area to area, the proportion of the rich (excluding Sarkar Rewari) from 9 to 16 per cent, and of the middling section from 19 to 33 per cent is significant. The rich section would include the village zamīndārs, the qānūngo, etc., who might not have cultivated on their own. Money-lenders could be the village zamīndār, rich peasants, or the village shopkeeper/*shroff*. The poor or *rezā riayā*, from 55 to 68 per cent (except in Rewari), would be even larger because in the above documents the village artisans are not included. Another document relating to four villages in pargana Wazirpur, Sarkar Akbarabad, shows that in vs 1783/ AD 1726 the artisan and service classes constituted 11 per cent.¹⁴

The emergence of a sizeable class of rich peasants with resources in ploughs, oxen, and land, and simultaneously the existence, possibly increase, of a reserve army of the indigent or the landless, had many social consequences. On the one hand it led to the emergence of a class of people in the villages and qasbas who had a higher standard of

living, and an appetite for superior quality goods produced in the cities or in different regions of the country.¹⁵ It was also the material and social basis for implementing the state policy of expanding and improving cultivation.

There are references to rich farmers in Mysore who owned ten or more ploughs and hired hands to till their fields to bring in the harvest. Some of them entered the sugarcane processing or oil-pressing business, for which a minimum investment was needed. Thus, they moved towards 'becoming capitalist and entrepreneur-manufacturers'.¹⁶ The aspirations of the class of rich peasants are reflected in many ways. Thus, the *nirguna sant* Rajjab, who lived in Sanganer and other artisan qasbas of eastern Rajasthan, considers laziness a sin, and does not ascribe it to bad deeds in a previous life. He calls laziness the biggest enemy—even more powerful than sex, because it prevented a man from earning wealth, which was important both for his mind and body. Such a man not only allowed his family to suffer, but lacked in godliness, and had no right even to repeat the name of Rama. Interestingly, though Rajjab condemns a miser for not sharing his wealth with others, even a miser had some redeeming features: he lived a life of great frugality, bore many hardships, and resisted all temptations in order to earn wealth.¹⁷

Earlier, the Sufi poet Malik Muhammad Jaisi from Uttar Pradesh had described a man without wealth as one who was 'as unstable as a leaf when there is even a little wind.... Wealth gives sight to the eyes, and is the basis of independence. A poor man without money grows even more miserable, like the stump of a dried tree without leaves'.¹⁸

A more common, traditional path of social mobility was to acquire more land and try to emerge as a zamīndār. This could be done partly by giving money on loan to needy peasants and foreclosing their lands when they were unable to repay. Famines came in handy when the poorer peasants were unable to make two ends meet and had to mortgage or abandon their lands.¹⁹ The Jat and Sikh resurgence, whereby many old Rajput and Brahman zamīndārīs were replaced by Jat or Sikh zamīndārīs, was another situation in which the rich khud-kāshṭ peasants improved their social status. A closer study of the Maratha movement would also show the extent to which the rich and the powerful elements in the peasantry were able to acquire desh mukhi or *mokāsa* rights in different parts of the country.

The eighteenth century saw further fragmentation of rural society. Thus, under the weakening central state control, intermediary zamīndārs ousted many primary zamīndārs or khud-kāshṭ, reducing them to the position of tenant farmers and extending their zamīndārīs. The Bhumihar *rāj* of Benaras, the Tenewa Jat *rāj* of Mursan in the Aligarh district, and the ancient Chauhan *rāj* of Mainpuri were some examples of this.²⁰ The eighteenth century saw the emergence of two institutions: *ijāradārī* and *ta'alluqdārī*. Their social basis merits attention. With the weakening of the position of the jāgīrdars, *ijāradārī* became rampant. We are told that during the reigns of Jahandar Shah and Farrukh Siyar, even khalisa lands were farmed out.²¹ While long-term *ijāras*, called *ijāra istimarār*, were taken up by rulers, such as the ruler of Amber, to augment their territories, or by *subadars* who were emerging as de facto rulers,²² shorter-term loans were taken by village zamīndārs, rich peasants, or even by merchants. Sometimes the rich peasants who dominated the village community took *ijāra* on behalf of the village community. This tendency is brought out in recent studies of eastern Rajasthan during the eighteenth century. Thus, in one study, it is pointed out that out of 1498 *ijāradārs* in eastern Rajasthan during a period of about fifty years, 677 or 45 per cent were peasants (*raiyyat*), *patels*, *sāhukārs*, and mahajans, chaudharīs, and qānūngos, all belonging to the category of 'rich' as identified above. There were another 230 or 15 per cent who formed a miscellaneous category. Both these categories included the khud-kāshṭ, either individually or acting on behalf of the village community.²³

While the ijāra holdings of the rich peasants may not have been large in size, their numbers indicated a new trend in village society.

There has been considerable debate about the nature, origin, and growth of ta'alluqdārī rights in north India during the eighteenth century and the later period. Its differing nature in Gujarat, Awadh, and Bengal was underlined by Noman Ahmed Siddiqi.²⁴ However, the social origin of this new class that had emerged as a class of zamīndārs of a superior status by the nineteenth century is still uncertain. According to Yasin's *Glossary*, written during the later part of the eighteenth century, a *ta'alluqa* signified an administrative circle created by the government officials, a newly purchased zamīndārī, and a tenure which entitled the holder to engage on behalf of other zamīndārs.²⁵ British investigations regarding the origin of the ta'alluqdārī right emphasized its recent origin and its close link with ijāradārī. They concluded that the ta'alluqdārs did not claim any hereditary right of property on the lands from which they collected the land revenue, but only to the office.²⁶

It is clear that the ta'alluqdārs were drawn from a miscellaneous social category including zamīndārs, administrative appointees, and those who had either recently purchased zamīndārīs or were ijāradārs. Thus, some of the upwardly mobile rich peasants or khud-kāshṭ who had become ijāradārs, or prospered in their local manufacturing business, could emerge as ta'alluqdārs. The point to note is that the eighteenth century was a period of social flux in which some people with a military following carved out or expanded their zamīndārīs. Simultaneously, a section of the rich peasants were acquiring zamīndārīs, either through joining rebellious movements or through purchase or acquisition of ijāradārī rights. Since all rights, including even posts of qāzīs, tended to become hereditary during the eighteenth century, this must have occurred also in the case of some ijāradārs. In Bengal, where ta'alluqdārs were subordinate to the large zamīndārs, the holders were often drawn from the village zamīndārs, *āmils*, rich peasants, etc. Later, when many of the old zamīndārs were ruined by a law under the Permanent Settlement, some of these sections along with the moneyed elements emerged as zamīndārs.²⁷

Social mobility in the villages was also aided by the conversion of many madad-i ma'ash holdings into zamīndārīs, some of them emerging as ta'alluqdārs, as in the case of Nanpara.²⁸ The eighteenth century also saw the accentuation of the process of settlement of Afghans on land, which was hastened by the rise of the Bangash and Rohila sardārs to power. The impact of this development on the structure of village society in the region needs further study.

Another aspect of social change in villages was sedentirization of tribal communities in some of the areas, such as Sind and Bihar. It may be noted that the bulk of the settled tribals emerged as small cultivators, often eking out a living with primitive tools, the superior rights in land being appropriated by outside elements. But sometimes it did lead to the establishment of tribal states (*rāj*).²⁹

Recent studies have also brought out the element of horizontal mobility in village society. There was constant movement of cultivators from one village to another in search of better terms. By setting up new villages these elements could hope to acquire ownership rights over land. These migratory peasants were called *pāhīs*. Even resident cultivators sometimes moved to other areas to escape local oppression. In that case, they became *pāhīs* in the new area. But they could also return to their original lands over a period of time and recover their lands.³⁰ Efforts of the state and their representatives to curb this movement, especially of the khud-kāshṭ, were of limited effect as long as there was a surplus of cultivable land in relation to cultivators. This being so, it does not seem correct to look upon

these rural migrations or movements as an index of a rural breakdown. These movements, especially the movement of *pāhīs*, was important for expansion of cultivation and resettlement of ruined villages. The movement of the *khud-kāshī* was a means of relieving social tension, as also a warning to the 'state' or its representatives against abuses and oppression. Thus, local tensions or abuses could and did arise, but the structure of the village society, and the elements of vertical and horizontal mobility, ensured that they were not sufficient or widespread enough to affect the social system as a whole.

II

Reference has been made to the existence of 120 towns and 3,200 *qasbas* or village-towns in north India during the sixteenth century, including cities like Delhi, Agra, and Lahore, which acquired a size equal to cities like Paris and London. This was a part of the process of urbanization in which about 15 per cent of the population came to live in towns and cities, including *qasbas*.³¹

Leaving aside the *qasbas*, four types of urban centres have been identified: first, those like Agra, Delhi, and Lahore, whose prime purpose was administrative, with manufacturing and religion as secondary; second, those like Patna and Ahmedabad, which were predominantly commercial and manufacturing centres with some administrative functions; third, religious and pilgrim centres like Benaras, Mathura, and Kanchi, with a large floating population combined with trade and manufacture; and, last, centres with specific manufacturing skills and techniques, such as Bayana (indigo), Patna (dyeing), and Khairabad (textiles).³² To these may be added a fifth type—port towns like Surat, Calicut, and Nagapatnam, which had an ambience of their own.³³ Port towns under the control of one or the other European companies (Hooghly, Diu, St Thome, Pulicat) were a class apart, bearing little resemblance with any of the other Indian towns. Persian writers of the time who were largely city-based, addressed themselves to the pattern of living in the capital, especially Delhi, called *shahar* or the city. Later, regional centres such as Murshidabad, Hyderabad, and Lucknow became centres of their affection when separate kingdoms or *riyāsats* or de facto independent states developed during the eighteenth century. Their remarks cannot, therefore, be generalized for the social life in the various types of towns mentioned above. However, there is little doubt that the towns acted as magnets and affected social values and culture.

Unlike the sultanate period when the establishment of a new dynasty led to the displacement of the old nobility, stable Mughal rule for a century and a half led for the first time to the emergence of a stable ruling class. As is well known, the numbers in the upper echelons grew four times during the first half of the seventeenth century, and grew by another one quarter by the end of the century.³⁴ This phenomenal growth of the ruling class had a number of social consequences. Apart from the original Irani-Turani and Turkoman immigrants and their descendents, the enlarged ruling class included immigrants or 'adventurers' from abroad, mainly from Iran and Turan, many of whom belonged to respectable families of the region and had administrative experience. Hindu rajas and military chiefs (*sardārs*), at first among the Rajputs and then among the Marathas, entered the ruling class. Indian Muslims or *Shaikhzadas* and Afghans were followed by lower officials among whom the *Khatris* and the *Kayasthas* were predominant. There were a few Brahmans, especially Nagars, who became *mansabdars* of the Mughal empire. Among Indian Muslims, a few men of humble origins, like doorkeepers and attendants

of elephant stables, were awarded mansabs and rose in the service.³⁵ This was an exception, though the idea that capacity rather than birth should be the criterion for imperial service was upheld.

It was not easy for this medley of races, religions, regions, and social groups to adjust themselves to urban life and court protocol prescribed and upheld by the Mughals. Thus, the Afghans were held up to ridicule for behaving more like village zamīndārs, and discarding the robes of a noble and adopting their rustic dresses at home.³⁶ The Rajputs also were not quite familiar with urban life, and chafed at the restrictions on their freedom. Many of them longed for home, sometimes leading to clashes.³⁷ Generally, they were happier campaigning than living in towns. Even some others, including princes such as Shah Alam, son of Aurangzeb, preferred camp life to city life. Thus, a combination of city life and camp life was a specific feature of the Mughal ruling class. Nevertheless, the Mughals were remarkably successful in evolving a type of city based on national cultural ethos, which became the standard of high culture and social intercourse in various regions. Music, poetry, including Hindi poetry—both Bhakti and erotic (*riti kalin*), and religious festivals became the means of communication within a ruling class divided by religion, ethnicity, region, caste, etc. The city formed the backdrop for such activities. The city and the court also acted as a school of manners. The code of conduct for the ruling elite was remarkable enough to be noted and commented upon by almost all the contemporary European travellers.

Limited but growing social intercourse in the cities, the broad liberal and humanistic approach of the Mughal rulers (with the solitary exception of Aurangzeb), and the teachings of the liberal Bhakti and Sufi saints who strengthened and deepened the popular traditions of toleration and living together, led to the emergence of a ruling class that on the whole did not support religious narrowness or religious fundamentalism, as many orthodox thinkers such as Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi or Shaikh Abdul Haqq found to their cost when they tried to win over the nobility to an anti-Akbar stand. Recent research has shown that the nobility did not support Aurangzeb in the war of succession on an orthodox basis. In fact, important sections of the nobility opposed Aurangzeb's policy of leaning on the ulamā in pursuance of his narrow policies.³⁸ As is well known, Asad Khan and Zulfikar Khan, two of the leading nobles of Aurangzeb, dismantled within six years of Aurangzeb's death the narrow, exclusionist policies associated with him.³⁹

Side by side with this, cities such as Delhi, and later Lucknow, played a leading role in fostering and developing a liberal ethos based on literary forms. Thus, when Aurangzeb left for the Deccan, his daughter Roshanara made Delhi a centre for arts based on a liberal ethos.⁴⁰ During the eighteenth century, Delhi emerged as a centre of Urdu poetry, music, and common participation in religious festivals even while there was a lot of contention in the political field. Delhi was followed by Lucknow.

The growth of towns and the expansion of a cash-rich urban ruling class led to the concentration of merchants, middlemen (*dallāls*) and commission agents (*gomāshas*) in urban centres. The number of artisans in the towns also grew. The numbers of these two sections and their proportion in the population of a city varied considerably, depending upon the nature and the size of the city. We can only guess the size of the business community from the size of the markets because, as Bernier observed, the ordinary sorts of merchants lived in houses above their shops, while the wealthy ones had commodious and well-built houses, some of which were double-storeyed and had beautiful terraces.⁴¹

Some idea of the size and importance of the merchant community living in towns could perhaps be gained from the detailed description of different sections living in some

of the parganas of Jodhpur and Jalor, given in some contemporary accounts of the seventeenth century. This information is summed up in Table 2.⁴²

TABLE 2. Number of Households

Town	Mahājans		Other upper castes	Artisans, etc		Service castes	Total
	No.	%		No.	%		
Sojat	738	32.7	881	299	13	326	2254
Jaitaran	720	39	555	370	20	9	1839
Merta	2512	44.4	913	1543	27	312	5657
Jalor	904	29.6	1150	426	13	311	3049
						(+232)	

It will be seen that the proportion of mahājans varied from 44 per cent in Merta to 29 per cent in Jalor, while the proportion of artisans varied from 13 to 27 per cent. These figures could not, of course, be applied to capital cities where many nobles lived with their large entourage and soldiers. Mahājans included Oswal, Maheshwari, Agrawal, and Khandewal groups in the case of Merta and Jalor.⁴³ The term is also used in the case of some villages in pargana Jodhpur where cultivators of mixed castes lived as distinct from the large number of villages inhabited exclusively by Jats or Vishnois. Similarly, Bohras and banyas are mentioned as cultivators inhabiting some villages of mixed castes. Thus, 'mahājan' could include some rich men from neighbouring villages. Separately, in the case of Jodhpur city, mahājans are distinguished from *saudāgarān* or shopkeepers and merchants. Thus, in describing the city, we are told that Nagori Gate had twenty-seven markets, which had 231 mahājan and twenty-two *saudāgarī* households, and five silversmiths. Jalor Gate had twenty-three markets, which had 366 mahājan households. This gives a total of 597 mahājan households in Jodhpur.⁴⁴

As distinct from mahājans and shopkeepers, the number of artisans indicated the state of manufacturers in a town. Despite Bernier's remarks about the harsh treatment of the artisans by the nobles (he also calls the artisans 'naturally indolent', and working 'out of necessity'),⁴⁵ the artisans, including master artisans called *ustāds*, had a respectable position in society, as is indicated by Abul Fazl's classification of society in which merchants and artificers are given a position after the warriors, and above the intellectual and religious classes.⁴⁶

It is clear that artisans who produced marketable commodities, or commodities for the special use of the upper classes, did not live exclusively in the towns. Such activities were carried out in villages around towns, or in special regions, as in the Krishna-Godavari region in south India. Towns such as Baroda, which had specialized in weaving for the market, had craft villages around it. As production expanded to cater to increasing foreign demand, the activities of weaving, spinning, reeling silk thread, etc., extended to many villages, especially those along national highways or waterways.⁴⁷

The point to note is that the process of monetization and growth of manufactures resulted in the growth of the number of people engaged in trade and manufacture on a caste basis. It is obvious that the caste system was flexible enough to permit such expansion. Thus, many new castes of artisans based on occupation came into being.⁴⁸

The growth of the upper classes and of the bureaucratic system of administration also called into being a class of professionals, such as medical men, artists of various types, and petty bureaucrats. These together have been called the 'middle class' or the middling

strata.⁴⁹ However, this class should not be confused with the middle class or bourgeoisie of the West, which sometimes had charters laying down their privileges. We can, however, talk of the beginning of a 'civil society' consisting of professionals, traders, and retired nobles, some of whom had set up orchards or markets (*mandīs or kataras*) at their settlements or around Delhi. The patronage to the arts provided by the rulers diminished under Aurangzeb on account of his orthodox beliefs, and then under some of his successors due to growing impoverishment. This was made up to a large extent by these sections. The rise of popular culture patronized by these sections was also reflected in the growth of a large number of places for *marsia khwānī* and of *kothā* where the city elite collected for poetry reading, music, and dance.⁵⁰

There are many developments that show that during the eighteenth century the rigid social divide between the landed feudal gentry and nobility, and the business sections was beginning to be eroded. Thus, rulers, members of the ruling family, and many nobles participated in domestic and foreign trade, sometimes with the help of traders, or lent money to them. The shroffs played a role in moving treasuries from one region to another, or helping the nobles maintain a financial link with their *jāgīrs*. On the other hand, we find examples of merchants and moneylenders being no longer satisfied with being *māl zāmins* or guaranters, but taking up directly the role of an *ijāradār*.⁵¹ Purchase of *zamīndārīs*, as in the case of Burdwan, or even *ta'alluqdārīs* by these sections, which became more frequent during the nineteenth century, may have actually started during the eighteenth century. The extent to which these sections were able to protect and promote indigenous culture in cities like Delhi, Lucknow, and Hyderabad, and act as critics of existing social order, needs careful study. The growth of a 'civil society' did not imply their holding a privileged position in the administration of the cities, even though the *kotwāl* was enjoined to organize people for reciprocal assistance in the *mohallas*, appoint a guild master for every guild of artisans, and there was a system of *nagar-seths* and *malik ul-tujjārs* on a caste basis in some of the cities: 'there was a system of local consultation and participation'.⁵²

Thus, we have the picture of a highly structured society, but one that was not static, and was capable of responding in a positive manner to political, economic, and cultural challenges that India had to face in medieval times. The remarkable capacity for growth, sometimes even in difficult and adverse circumstances, forces us to critically review some of the prevailing concepts regarding the hierarchical nature of the Indian social structure, which we are told was a prime factor in the slow changes in the country, whether social or economic.

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PART 2

CHAPTER 8

Demographic Distribution and Composition

Shireen Moosvi

One way of studying the social structure of any country is to break down its population under various classes and categories in numerical terms. However, this is possible only when we have at hand detailed censuses and calculations of domestic production. For periods where quantitative information of this kind is available only in bits and pieces, if at all, one has to employ a number of inferences and use qualitative evidence in order to present essential demographic data. This certainly sets limits to the degree of confidence with which we can make use of such data for analysis; however, if we bear in mind the limitations besetting us, we can still gather data about total population, its territorial distribution, the sex ratio, and occupational and caste breakdown, much of which a social historian may find relevant to his purpose. This chapter is written with this objective in view.

I

For no period prior to the seventeenth century does it seem possible to hazard even a guesstimate of population for the whole or any part of India.¹ Though Akbar (1556–1605) is reported to have issued an order in 1580 that his officials, including jāgīrdārs, had to record the names and occupations of all inhabitants, village by village,² we do not know what numbers resulted from the count. Nevertheless, we do have statistics of revenue, cultivation, yields, prices, wages, etc. in unparalleled detail, provided by Akbar's minister and official historian, Abu'l Fazl in his *Ā'in-i Akbarī*. This indirect quantitative evidence provides a means of estimating the population of Akbar's India. Moreland was the first to utilize the data for estimating the total population.³ He attempted an estimate of population of the Mughal empire around 1600 on the basis of the measured area (*ārāzī*) figures given in the *Ā'in*. He assumed that the *ārāzī* of the *Ā'in* represented gross cropped area, which could therefore be comparable with the gross cultivation at the beginning of the twentieth century. Stipulating further that the ratio between the extent of cultivation and size of population remained

constant during the period between 1600 and 1900, Moreland estimated the population from 'Multan to Monghyr' as 30 to 40 million around 1600.

For the Deccan and southern India, where no quantitative data for estimating the extent of cultivation are available, Moreland took the military strength of the Vijayanagar empire as the basis for working out the figure for total population. Assuming the ratio of 1:30 between soldiers and civilians, he estimated the population of the region at about 30 million. Making allowance for the regions lying within the pre-1947 limits of India, but not covered by his two basic assumptions, he put the population of Akbar's empire at 60 to 70 million and that of the whole of India at 90 to 100 million.

Moreland's estimate remained widely accepted for a long time. Nevertheless, his basic assumptions (and therefore his results) do not seem to be entirely valid. His basic premise for estimating the population of northern India are: first, that the *ārāzī* figures represent actually cultivated land; second, that the measurement was complete everywhere; and third, that the extent of cultivation per capita remained the same around 1600 and 1900.

However, there are strong grounds for believing that the *ārāzī*, being the area measured for revenue purposes, included some uncultivated land in varying proportions.⁴ Moreover, measurement had by no means been completed everywhere.⁵ Much larger area was under the plough in 1900 than in 1600, and the increasing pressure on land due to the growth of population makes his assumption of constant per capita extent of cultivation during the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries open to question.

With these weaknesses in his basic assumptions, Moreland's estimate of the population of northern India loses much of its credibility. It is weaker still for the Deccan and southern India. The army-civilian ratio he used is not only arbitrary, but undependable; the comparison with pre-World War I France and Germany seems to be particularly inept, since the military-civilian ratios maintainable in modern states and economies are so variable. None of these can by any stretch of imagination be used to set limits for the range of military-civilian ratios in pre-modern regimes in the tropical zones.

Moreland also seems to have given inadequate weightage to the regions not covered by his two estimates. To make an allowance for these areas, Kingsley Davis raised Moreland's figures for the whole of India to 125 million.⁶ This modification, reasonable insofar as it goes, does not, of course, remove the more substantial objections to Moreland's method.

Another attempt at estimating the population of Akbar's India, using different kinds of data, has been made by Ashok Desai.⁷ The device he adopts is rather complex and is based on numerous assumptions. He first compares the purchasing power of urban wages, making use of prices and wages recorded in the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, and the all-India figures for average prices and wages of the early 1960s. The crop rates of Sher Shah (1545-50) provide him with a means of measuring the change in agricultural productivity per unit of area and per worker. Using the consumption pattern in the 1960s as the base, he extrapolates the level and pattern of consumption at the close of the sixteenth century.

Taking into account other relevant modern statistics, Desai calculates with these figures the land under various crops per capita. Applying the revenue-rates for different crops given for certain provinces in the *Ā'in*, he computes the lowest and highest limits for the per capita land revenue. Dividing the total *jama*' (estimated net revenue) of the empire by these figures he fixes the population between 64.9 and 88.3 million. Desai himself prefers the lower figure of 64.9 million, supporting thereby Moreland's estimate of 60 million for Akbar's empire. He offers no estimate for the whole of India.

Desai's method has been criticized by Alan Heston.⁸ There have been objections to some detailed assumptions too.⁹ A comparison of modern all-India statistics with sixteenth

century data has, indeed, to be more sensitively made, since the introduction of railways have brought about major changes in crop distribution. Moreover, Desai divided the total jama' of the empire by hypothetical land tax per capita, without making any distinction between the provinces for which the land revenue rates are given and other regions where the tax incidence might have been quite different. Another assumption that requires correction is that the jama' was equal to total land revenue. It actually represented the total expected net revenue.

In spite of the legitimate objections to the estimates of Moreland and Desai, the methods suggested by them are in essence valid and can surely be used with certain qualifications and refinements, and with a revised set of assumptions. Following in Moreland's footsteps, but with modifications, we have tried to extract from the *Ā'in-i Akbarī's* ārāzī figures the gross cropped area for the region covered by Uttar Pradesh (UP), Punjab, Haryana, Multan, and Gujarat. Since the region comprised areas of full as well as backward cultivation, the relative extent of cultivation for this region has been assumed to be fairly representative. Taking into account the ratio between urban and rural population and the changes in size of holdings between 1601 and 1901, the population of India has been estimated at 136 to 149.9 million.

Following Desai's method, though in a simplified form and modifying the assumptions regarding productivity and pattern of food consumption, and drawing comparative data from the last decades of the nineteenth century when the impact of railways was yet fully felt, the population of the Mughal provinces of Agra, Delhi, Lahore, Allahabad, and Awadh has been estimated at 35.63 million, and assuming little change in the distribution (relative density) of population between 1601 and 1891, the population of the empire in 1601 has been estimated at 98.3 million and that of whole India at 145.5 million. On the basis of these calculations it has been argued that the population of India around 1600 can legitimately be assessed at about 145 million.¹⁰

There are no statistics of comparable detail for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The compound rate of growth between 1601 and 1871 works out to 0.21 per cent per annum if the population counted in the first all-India census (1872) as modified by Davis for fuller territorial coverage, namely, 225 million, is accepted. This rate of population growth compares well with the rates of growth in different countries of contemporary Europe.¹¹ Taking this rate as a working basis for the increase in Indian population in subsequent times, we can estimate the total population at about 176 million for 1701 and 210 million for 1801. This is close to the population estimates for 1801, ranging from 198 to 207 million.¹²

II

About the territorial distribution of population one can perhaps only speculate broadly on the basis of the varying extent of cultivation and of forests and habitation areas. The level of agricultural technology remaining largely constant between 1600 and 1900, one may legitimately assume a higher concentration of population in areas where a larger proportion of land had been brought under the plough relative to the beginning of the twentieth century. But since the measured area figures (ārāzī) are available only for some limited regions, this device to gauge the relative spread of population remains restricted to only a part of the empire.¹³ On this criterion, the middle Doab seems to have been most thickly populated around 1600; the population density in Rohilkhand and eastern UP must have

been much lower. Gujarat (excluding Saurashtra) appears to be another densely populated area of the Mughal empire. A better idea of the geographical spread of the population in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries can, however, be formed from the presence of the forests and their extent in different regions.

Abu'l Fazl in his description of the geography of the provinces of Akbar's empire makes references to forests. Other Mughal historians often mention forests in their accounts of the topography of the regions where Mughal arms penetrated. European travellers too have left records of forests they observed on their journeys. Much of this information has been collected and represented in the notes and maps of Irfan Habib's *Atlas of the Mughal Empire*.¹⁴

Evidence regarding the presence of animals such as wild elephant, cheetah, and wild buffalo is also of help in identifying forests and wasteland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Since the Mughal emperors were very fond of hunting, many of the localities where wild animals were caught or shot are well documented. Maps I A & B show the extent of forest, scrub, and desert as deduced from information of such varied kinds from the Mughal period.¹⁵

Beginning from the extreme east, we find Assam and the other north-eastern parts of India to have been thickly forested, except for a narrow stretch of cultivation on both sides of the Brahmaputra and a small cultivated region between the Brahmaputra and the Dihing rivers.¹⁶

In Bengal, the extensive presence of dense forests as late as 1781 is shown in Rennell's celebrated *Bengal Atlas*.¹⁷ In the north, the sub-montane or Terai forests broadened into a large block covering much of Koch Bihar and the sarkar of Ghoraghat. The forests, with some breaks, extended to Sylhet, and linked up with the Arakan forests. Much of the forest in Koch Bihar, Ghoraghat and Sylhet has all but disappeared. In the delta the Sundarbans that formed an isolated but large forest zone has receded to a thin strip on the edge of the Bay of Bengal.¹⁸

Orissa stood at the fringe of a forest, designated by Irfan Habib as the Great Central Indian Forest. Its eastern portion bore the name of Jharkhand.¹⁹ Even the agricultural zone was interspersed with sizeable pockets of thick and 'impenetrable woods'. There were forests along the sea coast, like the one to the south of Kanika,²⁰ and one reported by Hamilton (1720) along the river between Balasore and the sea.²¹ Lāhaurī, the official Mughal historian, reports that the Mughal forces in an expedition were forced to traverse a continuous forest of 30 *kurohs* (about 75 miles) south of Ganjam.²²

There was a thick, almost uninterrupted forest in foothills along the India-Nepal border, forming a broad band of forest right from Purnea in Bihar to Bahraich in Awadh, the central part of the famous Terai forest. Shown in Rennell's maps, it is mentioned by a number of earlier authorities, including Abu'l Fazl and Desideri.²³ The cultivated area in the region of Gorakhpur around 1595 was a mere one-twentieth of what it was in 1909-10.²⁴ It is true that cultivation started expanding here in the seventeenth century, and the land revenue and measured area statistics of Aurangzeb's reign suggest a three-fold increase of cultivation over the 1595 figure, but still the supremacy of the forest was hardly touched. The region is reported to be 'full of forest' in the middle of the seventeenth century.²⁵

The forest line marched further north-eastward then curved sharply to the left and covered much of Rohilkhand. The cultivation here around 1595 was confined to only one-fourth of the gross cropped area surveyed in 1909-10.²⁶

The most extensive unbroken forest in India during the Mughal times was in central India. The forest zone stretched from Bastar (between the Mahanadi and the Godavari)

and Jharkhand (between the Son and the Mahanadi) in the east to the borders of Gujarat (Dohad and Rajpipla), in which wild elephants were hunted;²⁹ it also extended in the north-west to the banks of river Chambal. It is this 'Great Central Indian Forest' that explains the significance of the Malwa plateau as a large isolated zone of cultivation. Another isolated agricultural pocket was that of Garh (around Jabalpur), reputed for its rich agriculture.²⁸

Beyond Rajpipla, towards the west, the area up to the sandy tract between the Sabar and Banas rivers was mostly under the plough. The only tracts that still had much jungle cover were situated on both sides of the banks of the Narmada, where Jahangir caught elephants in 1618,²⁹ and which Mundy found very wild and woody in 1633.³⁰

Besides Gujarat, the only region that must have been fully populated and where agriculture extended over almost the entire area by the close of the sixteenth century was the Middle Doab and Delhi west of the Yamuna. The jungles between the Ganga and Yamuna that provided a place of escape to the peasants in the fourteenth century had already largely disappeared.³¹ So too had the grasslands and scrub between Badaun and Delhi, once the home of tigers.³² In Agra and its surrounding districts where Pelsaert particularly noticed the lack of trees in the countryside in 1620, the cultivation around 1595 was as high as it was in 1909–10, and no forested area existed.³³

In Haryana the populated zone seems to have extended later at the expense of waste and grasslands largely owing to the introduction of canal irrigation. In the Punjab plains the only forested area was that of the Lakhi jungle on the banks of the Sutlej, which, according to Sujana Rai Bhandari (1695–96), was so thick that it was difficult even for a man on foot to pass through.³⁴ But even the Lakhi jungle must have had clearings here and there since Manucci informs us that the Bhattis had 'their dwelling in these huge jungles'.³⁵

The Indus plains were apparently sparsely populated since these were mainly encompassed by desert and scrub outside the flood- or river-irrigated zones. The Thar desert covered a considerable area and shows little change over the centuries. There seems to have been much land under scrub in the Punjab, Rajasthan, and Gujarat, and in the vicinity of Gwalior. The imperial hunting grounds for cheetahs were mainly located near Pakpattan, Bhatnair, Bhatinda, and Sunam in the Punjab; and at Merta, Nagaur, Jhunjhunu, Amarsar, and near Jodhpur in Rajasthan.

In peninsular India, the inhabited zone was limited since the forest cover down the Western Ghats and parts of the Deccan plateau was far more extensive than that at the beginning of this century. In Kerala, our seventeenth-century sources strongly indicate the presence of forests with references to wild elephants and abundance of teak and other forest timber.³⁶

On the Deccan plateau there was a large block of forest extending from the Krishna–Tungbhadra confluence almost to the delta, south of the Krishna river, with patches also on its left bank. Tavernier found wild elephants being caught just north of Tirupati,³⁷ a part of this great block of forest extending into southern Andhra.

From the uninhabited we may pass on to examine the inhabited zone. We can form some idea of the size of villages by comparing their number in various regions in Aurangzeb's time and in 1881.³⁸ Significantly, the number of villages in Aurangzeb's time in most areas was either appreciably higher than or equal to their number in 1881. In Bengal, Bihar, Sind, Kashmir, and Khandesh, and villages in the seventeenth century were as numerous as in 1881. But in the *ṣūbas* of Awadh, Allahabad, and Malwa the number of villages was much higher. The villages in the Agra province as counted in 1881 were only two-thirds of the number reported for the latter part of the seventeenth century. In Delhi this tendency was more pronounced, the number of villages in 1881 being only half of what it was under

Aurangzeb. For *ṣūba* Ajmer the figures are incomplete, but the village lists in Nainsi's *Vigat* indicate that the number of villages in western Rajasthan remained almost constant between the seventeenth and the close of the nineteenth century.

Taking into account the extent of cultivation in these regions, one may legitimately infer that the size of villages in Mughal times was on the average much smaller, if the population grew from about 145 million around 1600 to 285 million in 1881. Assuming that there was no big change in the territorial distribution of population, one should have expected a corresponding increase in the number of villages if the size of the average village remained the same. Therefore, even if the number of villages remained constant between 1700 and 1881, one can safely assume that the average size of villages in Mughal times was about half of what it was in 1881; and if there were more villages around 1600, the average size must have been smaller still. Presumably, where the number of villages has decreased, smaller settlements have been absorbed by the expansion of the larger ones or have been abandoned altogether.

III

For estimating the size of urban population in Mughal India, Irfan Habib used his estimate of the size of the agricultural produce retained in the village and the amount extracted by the towns. He suggests that the non-agricultural population maintained on the net revenue collection would have amounted to a fourth or a third of the whole, only if there had been no difference in the physical composition of the part of the surplus taken as revenue and the part left in the rural sector. But since the foodgrains component in the surplus must have been much smaller in the surplus taken than in the remainder of the agricultural produce, the non-agricultural population should, in his estimation, have been less than a sixth of the total population.³⁹

Another attempt based on more detailed quantitative data and assumptions suggests that the amount needed to maintain the bulk of the urban population and the amount left in the countryside for subsistence was in the ratio of 1:4.95. In other words, the urban population accounted for 16.8 per cent of the total, and the rural for 83.2 per cent. The 'urban' population, however, here includes grain-carriers, cartmen, traders, etc., some of whom could well have lived in the villages.⁴⁰

The best way to establish the validity of our estimate of the relative size of the urban population can be by sample checks with regional estimates. The only one so far made relates to Marwar (west Rajasthan). Nainsi in his *Vigat* (1664) provides us with the count of houses for certain towns, arranged by caste or profession.⁴¹ Making use of these data and such relevant statistical information as the number of ploughs, wells, etc., and assuming that the towns for which house counts have been given by Nainsi form a fair sample of the towns of Marwar, the urban population in Marwar in 1659–64 has been placed between 12.34 and 15 per cent of the total population of Marwar.⁴² Since the total population of Marwar as estimated here is indubitably on the high side (the data available for it being far less reliable than those for the urban population), we can almost certainly set the range for the urban population of Marwar as the minimum possible rather than the likely actual. In any case, even this minimum corroborates our estimate of the relative size of the urban population in the Mughal empire as a whole.

From the size of the urban population in general we may pass on to its distribution. The author of the *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī* (c.1593) reports that Akbar's empire contained 120 big

cities and 3,200 townships (*qaṣba*), each having 100 to 1000 villages around it.⁴³ Given the total population of Akbar's empire as 98.3 million, the urban population at 15 per cent works out to 14,700,000. Given, further, the *Tabaqāt*'s number of towns, the population of an average town should have been 4,441.

Such an average is not unreasonable, and Irfan Habib has already argued that this could induce confidence in the estimated size of the urban population (though his estimates are not precisely the same as ours).⁴⁴ The classification that the *Tabaqat* makes of the towns, setting 120 full-fledged cities besides 3,200 townships, or one city to nearly twenty-seven townships, cannot be supported by any detailed scrutiny. Nonetheless, we can say that some of the towns in the Mughal empire were very large indeed. Monserrate in 1581 considered Lahore, 'second to none either in Asia or Europe'.⁴⁵ Coryat in 1615 compared it to Constantinople.⁴⁶ In the 1670s Bernier found Delhi as big or bigger still than Paris.⁴⁷ Ahmedabad was described as comparable to London and its suburbs.⁴⁸ European travellers in the seventeenth century also give us numerical estimates of the populations of other major cities of the empire,⁴⁹ but since the basis of these estimates is not known, it is not possible to use them with much confidence, though generally speaking they support the impression of a large urban population in the Mughal empire.

Besides these estimates of the European travellers, the population of two Mughal cities has been estimated on the basis of contemporary evidence. Basing himself on the size of the imperial establishment and the workforce required to cater to the needs of the court and the nobility, Irfan Habib has estimated the population of Akbar's capital Fatehpur Sikri in the 1580s at 220,000.⁵⁰ This is corroborated by other evidence. In 1585 when the court was still at Fatehpur Sikri, Fitch said that 'Agra and Fatehpur are two great cities, either of them much greater than London and very populous.' He also thought that Fatehpur Sikri was 'greater than Agra'.⁵¹ London around 1600 is believed to have contained a population between 150,000 and 200,000.⁵²

These two sister capital cities of Akbar thus must have contained a population of nearly half a million around 1585. This accords with the European travellers' estimate of the population of Agra, when with the abandonment of Fatehpur Sikri it became the main capital city.⁵³ For the population of Delhi in the 1650s, the same device as used by Irfan Habib has been employed by Fatima A. Imam, who arrives at an estimate of over 600,000.⁵⁴ As mentioned above, Bernier thought that the population of Delhi was more or less equal to that of Paris.⁵⁵ At that time Paris had a population of 500,000.⁵⁶ By this time Delhi had replaced Agra as the major capital of the empire and some of its growth might have taken place at the expense of the latter city, though the size of Agra too remained impressive.⁵⁷

It would be interesting to compare the estimates of population of these Mughal cities with those of the largest cities of western Europe around 1600: Paris 200,000 to 300,000; London 200,000; and Rome: 100,000. Besides Paris and London, no other city of western Europe seems to have reached a population mark of 200,000 during the sixteenth century, though a number of them such as Antwerp, Amsterdam, Venice, and Naples exceeded 100,000.⁵⁸ If the size of the largest cities could be an index of urbanization, it can be claimed for the Mughal empire that it had attained a level higher than that of western Europe in 1600.

The distribution of urban population in modern economies generally accords with the geographical concentration of industry. Generally, however, there is no such indication available for pre-modern societies. One means of working out the level of urbanization in fairly large parts of the Mughal empire is furnished by the size of urban taxes relative to total taxation.⁵⁹ Given the nature of our statistical data, this device is usable only where

measurement of taxable land by Mughal administration was by and large complete. The results obtained are shown on Map 3.⁶⁰

Map 3 demonstrates that Agra was indisputably the largest city in the empire and the levels of urbanization in Agra province was fairly high. But strikingly enough, the most urbanized region appears to be Gujarat; the city of Ahmedabad accounted for the second largest amount of urban taxes after Agra. Quite a few other towns in Gujarat seem to have been large in size, and the number of towns (thirteen) in Gujarat was the largest for any province except Agra. The other significant pockets of urbanization appear to be Lahore, Delhi, Allahabad, and Malwa. Interestingly enough, the map of urban population based on the 1961 censuses of India and Pakistan⁶¹ largely confirms the pattern of urbanization worked out here.

The pre-eminence of Gujarat as the most urbanized region has wider implications for our understanding of the nature of Mughal towns. It has often been asserted that the Mughal towns tended to be 'camp' cities depending on the court and the potentates' camps.⁶² Such towns, subsisting directly on the expenditure of the ruling class, are thought to have been totally dependent on movements of the court or the jāgīrdār's headquarters. But the high level of urbanization in Gujarat could have had almost nothing to do with the military encampments. It can only be explained in terms essentially of the inland long-distance trade generated by the demand for luxuries and other craft products fashioned in Gujarat from members of the ruling class and their subordinate classes in whatever towns ('camp' cities or not) of other regions they might be residing in. We must realize that this could not be true just of Gujarat alone. In every region there would be specialized manufacturing centres catering to the demand of the ruling class, even if no jāgīrdār established his household and stationed his retainers there. These manufacturing towns were then distinct from the so-called 'camp' cities, though many towns, of course, might have partaken of a dual character, being both encampments and manufacturing centres.

IV

For studying occupational composition of seventeenth-century Indian towns, the best kind of data would be the actual occupational breakdown of the town inhabitants. So far there has been access to only a few town censuses, all from western Rajasthan and dating from the early 1660s. The data come from Nainsi's *Marwar ra Pargana ri Vigat*. This gives the total number of houses, categorized according to the castes of the occupants, for the towns of Jaitaran (1659), Sojat (1662), and Merta (1663), and three other smaller towns (Phalodi, Pokharan, and Siwana).⁶³

The three larger towns with more than 1,000 houses are of different kinds: Jaitaran, the smallest of the three was a township (qasba), the seat of a pargana headquarters, with just 1,839 houses or an estimated population of 8,518 (at the hypothetical rate of 4.5 persons per house). Sojat (spelt Sojhat in the *Vigat*) was a comparatively larger seat of administration, having eight Jain and eight Shaivaite shrines, considerable water resources, and two Persian wheels ensuring uninterrupted water supply to the town. Situated on the route to Jodhpur on which 2,000 carts plied, the town had 2,254 houses (giving us an estimated population of 10,143 at 4.5 persons per house). It was designated by Nainsi himself as a full-fledged 'town' (shahar).

Merta, which was formally in the sarkār (district) of Nagaur, was described by Peter Mundy in 1633 as a town 'reasonable big, verie well populated'. It had, according to Nainsi's

statements, 5,860 houses out of which 5,657 were occupied and 203 were vacant. Multiplying the number of occupied houses by 4.5 we get a total population of 25,457.

In studying the occupational breakdown given by Nainsi, some preliminary observations are in order. Nainsi gives a count (and breakdown) only in terms of houses. This means that we have here the occupations of the 'heads of houses' or the senior male occupants of the houses only. Thus, the separate occupations of women are entirely excluded. This notably means that spinners are excluded, though women in families of males of various occupations could also have worked as spinners. The second difficulty in these statistics is that castes and not occupations per se form the basis of Nainsi's classification. Since in the larger number of cases castes had set occupations (indeed, they frequently bore names of occupations, such as carpenters, ironsmiths, goldsmiths, etc.), the area where obscurity may occur is limited. But it cannot be wished away: for example, 'mahajans' normally mean those engaged in banking and usury, and are generally banyas (which caste is *par excellence* a mercantile caste engaged in brokerage, shopkeeping, grain trade, etc.). But several mahajans were also merchants; and persons of several other castes, Khatris, Brahmans, and others could also work as moneylenders and, therefore, as 'mahajans', as Nainsi himself recognizes in his exceptionally detailed occupational classification for Merta. A similar difficulty arises in the case of the Rajputs: they could be soldiers, landowners, and peasants. We can assume that at the time in question they were mostly soldiers, holding land grants, but we cannot be certain.

For Jaitaran, owing to its small size, Nainsi does not subdivide the inhabitants into larger categories, but simply gives count of houses for each caste or profession. In Sojat these houses are divided into two broad categories, the three upper castes (Brahman, Kayastha, and Rajput) along with mahajans (merchants and bankers). Muslims and peasants are put separately, while all others belonging to artisanal and service classes have been classified as belonging to the 'lower castes' (*pawan jati*). For Merta, the largest of the three towns, the categorization is more elaborate: Brahman, mahajan, Kayastha (clerical and accountant caste), other miscellaneous (*biji*) castes *pawan*, (lower) castes, and beggars. Occupational breakdown under some larger categories for each of the six towns, is given in Table 1.

The most noticeable feature in all the six towns is the dominance of the 'mahajans' on whose composition we have already commented. That the term 'mahajan' implies real engagement in moneylending and trade is shown by the inclusion under this head not only of banyas, but also of a considerable number of Jain priests (282), and musicians and dancers (thirty-two). In all the six towns the houses of 'mahajans' numbered a little less than one-third to one half of the total number of houses; in Pokharan they exceeded even one-half, being 57 per cent. Such a large banking and commercial sector tells us much about the market environment in which the Mughal towns functioned.

Brahman and Jain priests constituted the second largest segment, varying between one-tenth to one-sixth, except in Phalodi where they comprised over one-third of the total. Soldiers, generally Muslims, were also to be found in all the towns except the small towns of Pokharan and Siwana, and represented about 10 per cent of the total. All these together account for over two-thirds of the occupied male population in all the six towns. There is also a significant proportion of professional people offering personal services, from physicians to washermen, ranging from above 4 to above 10 per cent. From all this one can infer that employment in what may be loosely called the service sector was a very important element of town life of the time.

Finally, we come to the artisans. We see that they tend to be more numerous (as a percentage of the total number of houses) in the larger three towns than in the three

TABLE 1. Occupational Breakdown in Western Rajasthan

	Phalodi	Pokharan	Siwana	Jaitaran	Sojat	Merta
Mahajans	41.9	56.9	32.5	48.0	32.7	47.4
Brahmans	34.9	15.1	10.4	14.7	17.3	9.9
Kayastha and Khatri	—	—	—	0.9	0.4	0.9
Rajput and Sipahis	11.5	5.9	14.3	9.8	9.5	8.4
Merchants	—	—	—	9.8	9.5	8.4
Peasants	2.4	9.0	—	3.3	13.6	3.1
Textile-workers	0.8	2.3	2.1	10.3	3.5	8.3
Leather-workers	—	1.8	—	2.7	3.9	3.3
Wood-workers	—	—	—	1.1	—	0.9
Clay-workers and stone-cutters	0.6	0.7	0.7	1.3	3.4	2.5
Metal-workers	—	—	—	0.9	1.3	1.3
Services	7.5	5.9	6.1	4.9	10.3	8.2
Grain parchers, oilmen, etc.	—	—	—	2.0	4.4	5.8
Others	—	8.3	33.9	—	—	1.5
<i>Total</i>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

smaller ones. The houses of textile-workers (excluding washermen and tailors) constituted 8.3 per cent of the total number of houses in Merta, 10.3 per cent in Jaitaran, and 3.5 per cent in Sojat. In the smaller three towns the percentages ranged from 0.8 to 2.3 per cent only. The same trend is seen with clay- and stone-workers, whose numbers range from 1.3 to 3.4 per cent in larger towns, but is only 0.6 to 0.7 per cent in the three smaller towns. The three smaller towns did not have any metalworkers' houses to report, whereas both in Merta and Sojat their houses comprised 1.3 per cent of the total, and in Jaitaran 0.9 per cent. These data suggest that larger towns tended to have a larger share of craftsmen, possibly because from here they could reach a larger market.⁶⁴

When towns grew, there must have been migrations from villages into them. Bernier says that many peasants suffering from 'so execrable a tyranny' in the countryside sought 'a more tolerable mode of existence, either in the towns or camps; as bearers of burdens, carriers of water, or servants of horsemen'.⁶⁵ But besides such a shift, which involved an alteration of occupation, peasants often tended to migrate from one habitation site to another, as Babur noted.⁶⁶ Such migrations could occur within adjacent localities in search of better lands or lighter fiscal burdens.⁶⁷ But such migrations could also be on an inter-regional scale. In 1641 peasants from the Ahmedabad territory in Gujarat were found to have migrated into Navanagar;⁶⁸ and in 1644 peasants from imperial territories in Malwa were similarly found to have fled into the principality of Ginnur (modern Bhopal district).⁶⁹ Famines could generate more massive and more distant movements. In 1665 an official reported that as the result of a local famine, peasants of four parganas in eastern Rajasthan had migrated to such distant parts as Malwa, Burhanpur, Purab (modern East Uttar Pradesh), and Pilibhit.⁷⁰ In 1694–95 a famine in the Bagar tract on the north-eastern edge of the Thar desert was so intense that its inhabitants first migrated to Delhi and then towards Ujjain.⁷¹

There was finally migration of another sort: what Eaton, with the American usage in his mind, calls the movement on the 'frontier'.⁷² His main concern, however, was restricted

to Bengal. It is certainly true, as Eaton shows, that large areas in Bengal were reclaimed from the forest with peasant communities (mostly Muslim) moving from older areas to settle there.⁷³ But similar 'frontier' conditions existed elsewhere too. In what is now Rohilkhand, much reclamation was undertaken and new villages were settled during the seventeenth century.⁷⁴ However, the sources are so fragmentary that no quantitative statements about the extent of freshly populated lands, or for shifts of population, can be made: only the existence of the phenomenon can be asserted.

Besides migrations of agrarian origin, there were town-to-town migrations. Writing in the sixteenth century, Mukundaram in an imaginary account of the establishment of a city describes the settlement of Muslim artisan-migrants, including *julahas* (weavers) and *kagozias* (paper-makers).⁷⁵ When Mahmud Begda of Gujarat (1459–1511) founded Mahmudabad, large numbers of textile-workers came and settled there.⁷⁶ Caste traditions also recall many such migrations. A number of 'tanti' weavers of Bengal specializing in muslin manufacture, migrated to Orissa. There were also a large number of inter-regional migrations of weavers within Andhra, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala.⁷⁷ As with agrarian populations so with the urban, famines were a powerful engine forcing migration. In 1664 a local scarcity caused 500 families of Surat weavers to desert the city.⁷⁸ After the earlier famine of 1630–32, so many artisans deserted the provinces that the English factors were reporting in 1634 that they were unable to procure 'any calicoes whatsoever'.⁷⁹ In this case we do not, however, know how many of the artisans in fact survived the famine and plague to reach towns outside the famine zone. Still less can be said about the numbers of migrants.

It may be interesting to know the demographic status of Muslims by the time the *Ā'in* was compiled. No community-wise census being available, we can only proceed on the basis of stray statements and data. In 1634 it was stated by a local historian that 'the peasants of Sind are Muslims, most of them poor and God-fearing'.⁸⁰ Similarly, referring to a raid in 1658 by Pem Narayan, chief of Koch Bihar, into the sarkār of Ghoraghat (northern Bangladesh), the official historian of Aurangzeb, notes that 'most peasants of that territory were Muslims'.⁸¹ These two statements make it clear that the majority of the peasants of Sind and eastern Bengal were already Muslims by the mid-seventeenth century.

For other areas we need to scrutinize various kinds of sources in order to estimate the proportion of Muslims in the total population. At the moment we can present such evidence by way of illustration rather than as a firm indicator of the relative Muslim population. Out of thirteen village elders (*panch*) who sold land in Nagu village (Brindavan, near Mathura) in 1594, only three were Muslims. Out of five similar elders of village Aritha (now Radhakund), who in 1641 confirm an earlier sale, one is a Muslim. There was no Muslim, however, among the seven elders of Aritha who had made the deed of sale in 1579.⁸² Such data imply that Muslims were in a small minority in the countryside around Mathura, though their number might have been gradually increasing.

For towns, all in western Rajasthan, we have some interesting information from Nainsi's *Vigat* (1664). In the six towns of which we have data, the proportion of the Muslims among upper and lower castes and in the aggregate population of the towns is as given in Table 2.

Another set of data that can be used are furnished by Abul Fazl when he gives in the *Ā'in-i Akbarī* the names of the zamīndār castes for each locality (pargana). While there can be a valid objection that zamindar castes might not accurately reflect the religious allegiances of the rural population in general, Abul Fazl's data nevertheless needs careful examination, which would require one to establish the religious affiliations of certain castes. Elliot in 1844 carried out a scrutiny of this kind for the *Ā'in*'s zamindar castes as recorded for parganas in the area of the then North-Western Provinces (present Uttar Pradesh).

TABLE 2. Proportion of Muslims in Western Rajasthan (%)

	Muslims among upper castes	Muslims among lower castes	Muslims in total population
Merta	7.59	17.81	11.26
Sojat	4.45	6.90	5.10
Jaitaran	7.60	19.30	10.10
Phalodi	9.90	Nil	8.02
Siwana	16.60	Nil	14.50
Pokharan	8.40	Nil	6.46
Total	9.39	15.92	10.47

From which Muslims appear to have formed over 10 per cent of the population in these towns.

excluding Awadh). The results were shown in a map. It is obvious from the map that in 1595 only a small area out of the total was in the hands of Muslims as *zamindars*. The Rajput castes were dominant, covering the bulk of the area, followed by Brahmans (distantly behind), and then by Muslims (still more distant). The Muslims seemed almost at par with the Jats.⁸³ Clearly, here too the Muslims were a small, though not insignificant minority at the close of the sixteenth century.

There are no direct or indirect data available down to the eighteenth century that may even roughly indicate the sex division of population for the whole or part of India. However the first all-India census taken in 1872 revealed an excess of men over women. Until 1901 the sex ratio remained at around 98 women to every 100 men for the whole of pre-1947 India. A similar trend is apparent in some regional censuses taken during the second and third decades of the nineteenth century. Given in Table 3 is information available for sex ratios in these local censuses collected by Bhattacharya.⁸⁴

TABLE 3. Sex ratios in early nineteenth-century India

Surat district: 1815-16	Number of women to every 100 men
Hindu	94
Muslim	98
Parsi	98
Total	96

Kaira district Gujarat: 1820-26	
Higher-caste Hindu	92
Muslim	90
Others	88

Burdwan (West Bengal): 1813-14	
Higher-caste Hindu	100
Others	98
Total	99

Dehradun district (Uttar Pradesh): 1823	
Total	81

Deccan (Maharashtra): 1820-22	
Total	93

It is notable that among the lower castes, where women were earning members, the ratio to men was even more unfavourable than among the higher castes. One can perhaps legitimately infer that men exceeded women in all social strata by a significant margin in pre-colonial India.²⁶ The social factors that gave rise to this situation need careful investigation, but female infanticide and ill-treatment of women can be identified as the obvious causes.

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- 76 Ali Muhammad Khan, *Mira't-i Ahmadi* (Suppl. Ed. Nawab Ali) (Baroda: 1930), p. 7.
- 77 Shireen Moosvi, 'Skilled Labour Migration in Precolonial India, 16th–18th Centuries', paper presented at the Nineteenth International Congress of Historical Sciences, Oslo, 2000, p. 6.
- 78 *EFI*, 1661–64, pp. 320–21.
- 79 *EFI*, 1632–36, p. 64.
- 80 Yusuf Mirak, *Mazhar-i Shahjahani* (edited by Saiyid Husamuddin Rashidi) (Karachi: 1962), vol. II, p. 242.
- 81 Muhammad Kazim, *'Alamgirnama* (eidted by Khadim Husain and Abdul Hai) Bib. Ind., (Calcutta: 1865–73), p. 677.
- 82 The data are derived from the collection of Brindavan documents (photocopies) in possession of Professor Irfan Habib.
- 83 H.M. Elliot, *Memoirs... on the Races of the North-west Provinces, & c.* (edited by John Beames) (London: 1869), vol. II, Map facing p. 203.
- 84 D. Bhattacharya, *Report on the Population of Eastern India* (New Delhi: 1985), vol. III, 1811–20.
- 85 Shireen Moosvi, 'Work and Gender in Pre-Colonial India', in A. Fauve-Chamoux and S. Sogner (eds), *Socio-economic Consequences of Sex-ratios in Historical Perspective, 1500–1900* (Milan: 1994), pp. 105–16.

CHAPTER 9

The Professional Middle Classes

Iqtidar Alam Khan

The role of the professional and service groups belonging to the broad category of urban intelligentsia in medieval India has not yet been fully studied. There is uncertainty even with regard to the nature of the various forms of payments made to them by their employers. Did these payments amount to a share in the 'feudal' property or should they be regarded simply as income derived from an essentially contractual relationship between the possessors of certain skills and those who hired their services? Moreland, for instance, holds that the market for their 'professions and services' was narrow and that a member of this class 'could hope to obtain an adequate income only by attaching himself to the imperial court or to one of the principal governors'. While he takes note of the specialized nature of the work performed by certain categories of accountants and clerks, making their services indispensable for the state and the nobles employing them, he does not assign to them any role in the production relations beyond that of contributing to 'an imperfect and precarious measure of security'. On the whole, he tends to regard them as a parasitical group.¹ He thus appears to ignore the high degree of specialization that existed in Mughal India in such fields as revenue administration, the production and use of firearms, and the management of the complex and massive construction projects. His interpretation, apparently, rests on an implicit understanding that, unlike merchants and artisans, the intelligentsia were joined to the dominant ruling property by customary ties.

It should be worthwhile in this context to consider K.N. Raj's sociological definition of 'specialized skill' as 'property taking a different form'.² This definition, when applied to the functionaries doing specialized jobs for the state and the nobles in Mughal India, may lead to the characterization of their income, including salaries paid by the Mughal authorities, as a distinct form of property. For the purposes of this essay, Raj's definition as applied to the professional groups of Mughal India is accepted as a working hypothesis.

It is difficult to give, in the absence of sufficient data, even an approximate assessment of the levels of income obtaining among different professional groups. But there can be little doubt that a considerable demand existed in the government as well as in society at large for the services provided by some of the middle-class professions like

clerks, accountants, physicians, and teachers. It was possible for members of these groups to become sufficiently rich on the strength only of their skills and specialized knowledge.

I

The available information enables us to state that certain categories of revenue officials formed a very prosperous group.¹ This prosperity was discernible down to the lowest rungs. We gather, for instance, from the *Tazkira-i Pir Hassu Teli*, a work compiled in 1644–47, that its author, Surat Singh, who never served in any capacity higher than that of a *karkun*, purchased a house for seven hundred rupees in a respectable locality of Lahore.² We learn from the same source that in 1630–31, Khwaja Udai Singh, a petty official, spent 3,000 rupees on the construction of a well attached to a dargah at Lahore.³ Again, according to Surat Singh, his elder brother Ganga Ram had grown fabulously rich during the time he was serving as 'amil of a pargana.⁴ His salary as 'amil would come to around 130 rupees per month.⁵ From contemporary standards this would no doubt be regarded as a fairly good income. But it could not have been sufficient to meet the expenses of his ostentatious style of living depicted by Surat Singh. Another pargana-level official, Khwaja Hari Chand, is also mentioned by Surat Singh as leading an ostentatious life. He is reported to have distributed gold and cows among Brahmans. Each morning he would eat with Brahmans and would offer meals to the members of all the thirty-six castes.⁶ A similar case can be cited from Aurangzeb's reign. Abdus Samad Khan, the *amin* and faujdar of Jahanabad (sarkar Badaun) had established a *pura* (small township) in the name of his son, which brought considerable income to his descendants down to 1717–18. This property, according to Itimad Ali Khan, included orchards, a *sarai*, and Turkish baths (*hammam*).⁷ It was perhaps on account of this prosperity of the revenue officials, who belonged mainly to castes like Brahmans, Kayasthas, Khattris, and Banyas, that Shah Waliullah, in one of his letters to Ahmad Shah Abdali, complained about the 'Hindus' appropriating most of the wealth on account of their monopoly of the 'offices of *mutasaddis* and *karkuns*'.⁸

(Likewise, there is ample evidence to indicate the exceptional prosperity of the accountants, clerks, and other officials connected with revenue administration, or doing other kind of specialized jobs in the provincial and central establishments. To cite a few cases at random, a certain 'Muhammad Shafi Buyutat' had built a mosque in 'muhal-la Talla' of Lahore some time before 1644;⁹ Itimad 'Ali Khan, author of *Mir'at-i Haqqiq*, while complaining of his 'poverty' all the time, admits of owning a 'haveli' in Ahmadabad.¹⁰ Another such case was that of Shaikh Abdul Wahid, *munshi* of Shaista Khan. He was getting only 100 rupees a month, but the way he was leading his life rivalled that of the high nobles.¹¹ Many more examples of this nature can be cited. At a more general level, a vague idea of the wealth in the hands of this category of people in Gujarat towards the first quarter of the eighteenth century can be had from the fact that in 1725 political authorities succeeded in extorting Rs 5,73,000 from eight officials residing at Ahmedabad.¹² Similarly, in 1739, out of the total amount of 171,200,000 rupees collected by Nadir Shah in cash from the nobles and common people of Delhi, 150,000,000 were realized from the high nobles and the remaining came from other sections of the people. With the help of available lists of the people from whom comparatively larger sums were realized, it can be seen that out of the amount extorted from the 'commoners', 3,100,000 were taken from eleven rich officials who were serving as *diwans*, *buyutats*, *peshkars*, and *khazanchis*, in the sarkars of individual nobles or occupied similar positions in royal establishments.¹⁴

The amount of wealth possessed by this group cannot adequately be explained on the basis of their salaries alone. Regarding the revenue officials serving in high positions at the central and provincial levels, we may safely assume that their salaries would rarely go beyond the limit of Rs 500 per month mentioned by Abu'l Fazl.¹⁵ A few of them holding considerable mansabs were perhaps the only exceptions. The salaries of the local officials serving at the pargana level, like the qanungo, *muharrir*, and *nawisanda tapadar*, ranged from Rs 10 to 17 per month. Comparatively better paid local officials like the 'amil (as also the *karori*), the amin, and the accountant serving under the 'amil were getting Rs 133, Rs 116/8, and Rs 50 respectively.¹⁶ These salaries could not have been the only basis of large properties created by many of the revenue officials. To trace the real sources of income contributing to the prosperity of the revenue officials one should look elsewhere.

Apparently, a major part of the income of revenue officials came from large-scale manipulation in revenue collections on the one hand and from different kinds of side businesses like cultivation, usury, speculation, horticulture, revenue farming, management of rent-yielding properties in the towns, and so on. In addition to all this was the income ensured by the system of presents and bribes, which carried almost a customary sanction.

The ingenious methods used by the officials for cheating the state and the nobles make interesting reading. An intelligence report from Aurangzeb's reign accuses an amin and a karori in suba Ajmer of 'conspiring with *fotadar* (treasurer) to deposit the cash collected by them with the *mahajan* for long periods at interest and profit for themselves'.¹⁷ Yet another method of earning profit on the amount collected as revenue was to change the nature of the coins in the process of transmitting the collections to the central treasury. There is on record a complaint that *batta* charged on Shahjahani rupees in the markets of Haibatpur and Firuzpur (suba Multan) was much below the official rate or *dastur*. The revenue officials, therefore, realized the revenue in Shahjahani rupees and then changed them in the market for Alamgiri rupees, of which they thus got a larger number than were obliged to hold according to the official rate.¹⁸ That this practice was not confined to suba Multan is borne out by a letter written by Balkrishan Brahman to a mahajan of Hissar, Lakhim Das, complaining bitterly against his insistence on having the amount deposited with him accounted in Alamgiri rupees only, irrespective of the kind of rupees originally handed over to him by the official. It was, apparently, a rare case of a mahajan not observing the rules of the game. Hence, Balkrishan's pained remark: 'If a person like Chaudhuri Lakhim Das could behave in this manner what is one to say of others.'¹⁹

A particular kind of cheating practised by the qanungo with the help of the *patwari* involved the manipulation of village records (*kaghaz-i kham*) maintained in Hindi, which were mainly relied upon by the state for verifying the actual revenue realization (*hal-i hasil*) of each village. Taking advantage of the difficulty that a higher noble, or for that matter even an average official of the central or provincial *diwani*, would have in identifying and understanding the village records properly, the qanungo, the record-keeper at the pargana level, in collaboration with the patwari, would often fake village records with the aim of covering up the defalcation of revenue collections. In one such case reported from Shah Jahan's reign, this kind of operation had become necessary to cover up the misappropriation of a considerable amount from the collection of a pargana by the *shiqdar*.²⁰ When many such cases of faked village records were discovered during Shah Jahan's reign, the post of a special officer with the designation of amin was created in every *mahal*. The main duty of a pargana-level amin was to check the irregularities of the qanungos and 'amils.²¹ But this measure, instead of solving the problem, would have only added to the number of

people conspiring together at the sarkar and pargana level to defalcate large amounts from the revenue collection. The role played by the newly appointed pargana amins may be judged from the behaviour of one of them who is reported to have helped Surat Singh, the author of the *Tazkira-i Pir Hassu Teli*, to evade enquiry into his conduct after he had come to be suspected by the karori and malguzar ('amil) of having embezzled the revenues.²²

It seems that helping a colleague to evade enquiry into charges of corruption against him was quite consistent with the professional ethics of local officials. Faking records to mislead higher authorities inquiring into the conduct of an official would be regarded by his colleagues almost as an act of piety. This is borne out so clearly by the manner in which Surat Singh refers to the conduct of his preceptor Shaikh Kamal who had extended his moral support to a qanungo's forging the village records with the object of frustrating an enquiry into the conduct of a *shiqdar*.²³ Even in the case of a serious quarrel between two officials, they were expected by their colleagues not to carry it to the point of exposing each other's weaknesses before the authorities. In most cases quarrels between two members of the profession would be speedily settled with the help of mutual friends. In one such case adjudicated by Bhimsen, the parties involved were not only persuaded to make up with each other, but they 'agreed to pay a nominal amount of fine'.²⁴ It is not known how the money raised through such fines was used. One can only conjecture that it would either be spent on celebrating the reconciliation among colleagues by having a feast or would go into some kind of common pool.

Some idea of the routine manner in which the local officials were capable of defalcating the revenues can be had from the experiences of the officials of the English East India Company who were called upon to run the revenue administration inherited by the British from the earlier regimes. In a report prepared by Walker Elliot on the basis of minute scrutiny of village records of district Guntur, a case was made out that 'in less than twelve years the Company's government had lost over 74 lacs which was more than six times the annual revenues from the district'.²⁵ If this was the position under the comparatively efficient government of the English East India Company, one can well imagine the extent of the power and independence enjoyed by the officials at the sarkar and pargana levels under the 'softer' administrations of the Mughal empire as well as its successor regimes during the eighteenth century.

A study of *jama'* statistics and the dastur rates given in the *A'in-i Akbari*, undertaken by Shireen Moosvi, suggests that the incidence of *jama'* did not amount to even half the average dastur rates in the heartland of the empire.²⁶ It is difficult to explain this wide gap between *jama'* and the amount that should have been collected according to dastur rates. At least partly this may be attributed to large-scale defalcation of revenues by the officials.

To emphasize the role of the local officials in making the operation of the central authority ineffective at the sarkar and pargana levels, R.E. Frykenberg has been tempted to fabricate a mock-up concept of 'anti-state'.²⁷ which does draw our attention to the unmistakable contradiction existing between the elements of nobility and the state dominated by them on the one hand, and certain sections of the urban intelligentsia on the other. Frykenberg, however, is not on firm ground in assuming that these officials derived their power to defy the higher authorities from the customary ties binding them closely to the village, caste, and family units. This emerges from the evidence cited by Frykenberg himself. While carrying on a war of wits against the 'exogenous system of power', the record-keepers did not spare the village chiefs either. They were often found maintaining three sets of records, two of them being fake versions meant to mislead the higher authorities and the zamindars respectively.

The revenue officials would generally deal harshly with the peasant communities. There were a number of cesses that these officials continued to realize from peasants in defiance of explicit orders of the central authority forbidding such exactions. At times the cesses imposed by the revenue officials would come to a third of the total *jama'* of a village. While trying to realize these cesses, the officials would treat the peasants and small zamindars with the utmost severity. Sometimes they went to the extent of even 'selling the sons and cattle' of the *ri'aya* for realizing their demand.²⁸ In Gujarat the revenue officials used to impose cesses even on merchants and other holders of urban property. One cess of this kind mentioned in one of Aurangzeb's farmans was realized at the rate of 2 per cent of the price fetched by a house. According to Ali Muhammad Khan, the excesses of the qanungos of Cambay, towards the mid-eighteenth century had assumed such proportions that the merchants of that place were being forced to shift to Surat.²⁹ Apparently, Frykenberg's difficulty on this point arises mainly on account of his inability to see that the local officials in Mughal India were actually fighting for securing the interests of the social category to which they belonged, namely, a large section of urban intelligentsia, rather than to protect or insulate the village communities from the control of an 'exogenous system of power'.

(It is only in this perspective of a growing clash of interests between the elements of nobility and certain sections of the professional middle class that one can fully appreciate the bloodthirsty attitude of the imperial authority towards the revenue officials serving at pargana level as well as those doing specialized jobs in higher echelons of the administration.) In the Mughal empire 'the essentially *humane* approach' to individuals constituting the nobility³⁰ was in sharp contrast to the treatment meted out to the revenue officials suspected of dishonest practices. The evidence on this point is literally unending, and it is full of sickening details of torture inflicted on the persons of the officials and their families.

The Mughals apparently inherited this practice from the Delhi sultanate. Ziya Barani tells us that Alauddin Khalji imposed the most draconian punishments on revenue officials. A person entering the clerical profession ran such a high risk of being imprisoned and tortured to death that generally people would be reluctant to marry their daughters to him. Death was deemed preferable to revenue employment.³¹

The description seems to apply to the revenue officials during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as well. It is borne out, for instance, by one of Kabir's poems included in the *Guru Granth Sahib* wherein the recall of the 'amil for settlement of accounts is compared to death 'when man is called for a similar purpose by the Creator'.³² Badauni's description of the punishment received by the karoris at Todar Mal's hands in Akbar's reign is classic: 'Many good men died,' he writes, 'from the severe beatings which were administered and from tortures of the rack and pincers.'³³ This kind of treatment of revenue officials is found throughout the Mughal period. For instance, it is reported that Shah Jahan's minister Sa'ad Allah Khan was responsible for keeping a number of karoris in prison for more than twenty years.³⁴ A casual remark of Surat Singh alluding to the repeated imprisonment of a certain Khwaja Mathuradas goes to show that this was almost a routine matter.³⁵

The situation so far as the revenue officials were concerned remained more or less the same under Aurangzeb and his successors. In one of his orders addressed to the diwan of suba Ahmadabad, Aurangzeb instructs the provincial authorities to the effect that the cases of 'amils languishing in prison for long periods be reviewed and their terms of punishment be specified.³⁶ But Bhimsen's description of the tortures inflicted upon Diler Khan's munshi, Pir Muhammad Khan, to force him to disclose the wealth left behind by his master³⁷ makes it evident that, under Aurangzeb, the treatment of the revenue officials and clerks was basically the same as during the reigns of his predecessors. Regarding the

punishment of revenue officials and clerks under the later Mughals, innumerable cases can be cited. I'timad 'Ali Khan has recorded a number of such cases. By way of example, we may cite the rather casual entry made by him in his journal of 29 December 1725 noting that 'seven cart-fulls of 'amils', brought to Ahmadabad from parganas sometime earlier were being interrogated.³⁸ In the light of such evidence, it would not be wrong to say that in Mughal India revenue officials as a category were treated as the potential enemies of the ruling classes.

II

(In connection with the relationship between the different sections of the professional middle classes and the imperial ruling class, brief reference may also be made to the physicians, *jarrahs*, and others earning their livelihood by treating people for different kinds of afflictions.)

In line with his general view of the economic position of the professional groups in Mughal India, Moreland seems to think that the social demand for the services of a physician was very limited. It flows from this understanding that the members of the medical profession could hope to obtain a respectable income only by attaching themselves to the court or the sarkars of the high nobles. Thus, the salaries earned by them in the service of the state or the nobles would be characterized as patronage rather than payment for a service in demand.³⁹ But one may argue that in drawing this one-sided picture Moreland seems to have ignored a whole set of evidence indicating that in a major part of northern India public demand for the services of the physicians was quite large.

We come to know from a casual remark attributed to Pir Hassu Teli that towards the beginning of the seventeenth century, services of private practitioners were available in the market places of Lahore (*tabiban-i kucha o bazar*). In the *Tazkira-i Pir Hassu Teli* there is a specific reference to Hakim Basant who practised at Lahore during Shah Jahan's reign. He is mentioned in connection with the illness of the wife of a petty official who was under Hakim Basant's treatment for some time.⁴⁰ An idea of the wide demand that existed at Lahore for medical services during Aurangzeb's reign can be had from Manucci's memoirs. After his service in Dara Shukoh's artillery ceased abruptly with the defeat of that prince, he established himself at Lahore as a private practitioner. The first person whom he treated successfully was the wife of a qazi who had been given up as a hopeless case by 'all the Persian and Indian physicians'. This made him very popular among the nobles as well as the 'lower orders'. 'So great was my name that I had of being fortunate with the cases that I undertook,' writes Manucci, 'that they came from many places distant from Lahore to call me in to visit patients.' It seems that Manucci's income from his private practice at Lahore was much greater than what he could hope to earn in the service of a noble. When Muhammad Amin Khan, governor of Lahore, offered to employ him as a physician, Manucci politely declined the offer since he considered the proposed salary insufficient.⁴¹

From Badauni's stray remarks about some of the lesser-known *tabibs*, one gathers that they lived mainly on private practice. For example, while mentioning the antecedents of Shaikh Bina, an accomplished *jarrah* in Akbar's service, Badauni informs us that his father Shaikh Hasan was a medical practitioner of Sirhind (*mutatabbib-i Sirhindi*). Some of these physicians were no better than quacks. One such quack (*na-tabib*) of Fatehpur Sikri was responsible for the death of well-known poet Qaidi Shirazi. There were others like Jalal Tabib who despite their standing in the profession had come to earn an ominous reputation.⁴²

Similar evidence can be cited for the whole of the Mughal period, suggesting that in places like Jaunpur, Khairabad, Benaras, Kalanaur, and Hissar there were private practitioners whose service could be procured on payment. Banarsidas, the author of *Ardha-kathanak*, informs us that in 1591 he was under the treatment of an 'expert physician' of Jaunpur for about one year. In 1602 Banarsidas fell ill with syphilis at Khairabad. On that occasion he was under the treatment of a *nai* (barber) for six months. After his recovery, he rewarded the *nai* handsomely. When Banarsidas' father fell ill at Benaras in 1616, he was examined by a local physician who declared the illness incurable.⁴³ We also know about a petty official of Shah Jahan's time who, on being bitten by a dog at Kalanaur, was carried by his relations to a local physician apparently considered a 'specialist' for treating such cases. According to our source, the medicine that this 'specialist' administered to the patient was so potent that it turned the man almost insane for some time.⁴⁴

From a letter written by an official stationed at Hissar in the early years of Aurangzeb's reign we come to know that he was under the treatment of a local tabib, Balram Misr, at that time. The same official refers to another local physician, Manka Tabib, who, we are told, belonged to an old family of tabibs and possessed particular skill in the arts of pulse-reading and prescription. Apparently, Manka had a large practice at Hissar.⁴⁵ The fact that a French doctor, Martin, had established his private practice at Delhi during the second quarter of the eighteenth century⁴⁶ was yet another indication of the wide demand that existed for the services of the physicians in places like Delhi and Agra. Last, in this connection, it is worth remembering that Tavernier's often quoted observation testifying to the 'absence' of physicians only refers to the territories of Carnatic, Golkonda, and Bijapur. In this statement of Tavernier it is clearly implied that his impression regarding the situation in northern India was quite different.⁴⁷

From the cases cited above it would appear that demand for the services of physicians existed mainly among petty officials, merchants and traders, and persons belonging to the category of urban intelligentsia in general. Perhaps certain better-off sections of artisans would also be occasionally going to medical practitioners. At Agra, Delhi, and Lahore, naturally, a majority of the persons consulting private doctors belonged to the categories of the petty mansabdars and gentlemen-troopers, but in places like Benaras, Jaunpur, Kalanaur, Khairabad, and Hissar the clientele of medical practitioners would largely consist of traders, artisans, and literati.

It is understandable that the physicians attending upon the king and high nobles would be more prosperous. Such persons must have naturally enjoyed greater social prestige. Some of them, like Jalaluddin Muzaffar Ardistani, Hakim Alimuddin (entitled Wazir Khan), and Hakim Daud (entitled Taqarrub Khan), even succeeded in rising to the position of nobles. But it is worth remembering that the total number of physicians enjoying royal patronage was very small. They apparently represented a very small fraction of the total number of the people active in the profession. If one is to go by the number of physicians listed in the chronicles as serving the king and high nobles at different points of time, it would appear that after Akbar, royal patronage to physicians steadily shrank.⁴⁸ Moreover, a majority of those enjoying royal patronage were foreigners, mainly Persians. The shrinking of royal patronage to physicians after Akbar appears to have mainly affected those of Indian origin.⁴⁹ It can thus be seen that towards the middle of the seventeenth century the total number of physicians living entirely on royal patronage was negligible; and that these people were mainly foreigners, who should essentially be treated as members of the noble class rather than those of the medical profession.

The real scope for large-scale employment of physicians in the service of the state existed only in the lower echelons. They would be employed, for instance, as consultants looking after the health of troopers commanded by the ordinary mansabdars.⁵⁰ It is plausible that in many cases such consultants would be employed by the mansabdars on a part-time basis. One may imagine that the physicians attached to the contingents of mansabdars would also be responsible for treating the persons wounded in action, which might suggest that their duties were quite strenuous and the service provided by them was important for the efficient functioning of the imperial war machine. Apparently, the total perquisites of the tabibs employed by the mansabdars were quite attractive. In this connection one may take note of the evidence indicating a tendency on the part of some of the tabibs of smaller towns to seek employment under the mansabdars. This is borne out by a letter of Balkrishan Brahman, a local dignitary of Hissar, recommending a tabib of his town to a high noble for employment. While praising the skill of the tabib, he goes on to write: 'A large number of people have benefited by associating with him.' This suggests that the man seeking employment was already having considerable clientele in his own locality.⁵¹

Hospitals established by the state and nobles in some of the towns were yet another agency providing employment to ordinary physicians. The hospitals run by the state in larger towns particularly for the benefit of travellers were established by Jahangir.⁵² Such hospitals continued down to the end of Aurangzeb's reign. If one goes by the information contained in the *Mir'at-i Ahmadi*, it would appear that sometimes such hospitals existed even in small places if these happened to fall within the permanent (*altamgha*) assignments of the high nobles. There is a reference in the *Mir'at-i Ahmadi* to a complex containing a school, a mosque and a hospital built by Saif Khan at Jeetalpur (in Gujarat) in 1622–23.⁵³

From these examples it can be inferred that the number of ordinary physicians finding employment with the official and semi-official agencies in minor positions was quite large. But, in view of the specialized nature of their work and essential service that they rendered, the position of physicians employed in the contingents of the mansabdars and *shifa-khanas* established by the state was identical with that of the members of other learned professions serving the state and the nobles as petty officials.

Having noticed the economic basis of the ties obtaining between the groups constituting the professional middle classes and those who appropriated the bulk of agrarian surplus, namely, the Mughal ruling establishment, we may now focus attention on certain aspects of the overall behaviour of these groups that suggest their affinity to other middle-class groups, particularly the trading communities.

In this respect, evidence having a bearing on the degree of inter-professional mobility discernible among them would be of particular interest. There is ample evidence to suggest that individual members of these groups had considerable opportunities to move on from one profession to another notwithstanding the limitations imposed by caste and other traditional divisions. An early example of this kind of mobility can be cited from the family history of Banarsidas, the author of the *Ardha-kathanak*. His grandfather Muldas was the *modi* of a Mughal nobleman of Humayun, while his father Kharagsen served till 1569 as a *fotedar* under Sirimal Rai Dhanna, diwan of the Afghan ruler of Bengal Sulaiman Karraani. Subsequently, he deserted his post and set up some kind of business at Agra.⁵⁴ It is possible to cite many more cases pointing to growing mobility between the artisan and merchant groups on the one hand and learned professions like teaching, accountancy, record-keeping, priesthood, and literary writing on the other. To give only a few random examples, three noted poets of Akbar's reign, namely, Ghubari, Mahmi, and Qasim Hindi, were the sons respectively of a *baqqal* (grain merchant), a *tir-gar* (arrow-maker), and a *fil-ban* (elephant-keeper).

Or one may cite Qazi Jalal al-Din Multani's case who was originally a trader and switched over, at a later stage in his career, to the teaching profession.⁵⁵ Similarly, the prominent trading families of Rustamji and 'Abdal-Ghafur of Surat were founded in the seventeenth century by persons of priestly background, while the father of Seth Dayaram, the broker of the Dutch East India Company in the 1720s, was a munshi (letter-writer) at the Dutch warehouse at Surat.⁵⁶ In contemporary sources one also comes across persons who were engaged in commercial and literary professions simultaneously. The positions of *khazinedars* and diwans in the sarkars of the nobles were invariably held by money-changers who, in addition to their official duties, also conducted their normal business. From the first quarter of the eighteenth century we begin to come across many cases of traders and mahajans obtaining appointments in local administration as chaudharis and qanungos.⁵⁷

There was another significant feature. In many cases the clerical staff in the service of the king and the nobles were recruited from the trading communities; the most conspicuous examples being furnished by the Khattris and Jains of northern India. The tradition of the Khattris taking up jobs as accountants and record-keepers in the service of the local authorities goes back to the middle of the fifteenth century. Guru Nanak's father, a Bedi Khatri, was an accountant under a local chief.⁵⁸ A large number of Khattris were in the employment of the state and the nobles throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Side by side with their rise in the clerical jobs under the Mughals, the Khattris continued to participate in trade and commerce on a large scale. Writing in 1643, Manrique testified to the enormous wealth possessed by the Khatri traders of northern India.⁵⁹ By the end of the seventeenth century a large number of Khatri families had settled in the commercial centres of Gujarat.⁶⁰

The Khattris settled in places like Ahmadabad and Surat followed the professions of trade as well as accountancy. A considerable degree of caste solidarity existed amongst these people. This is borne out by an episode recorded by I'timad 'Ali Khan. On 15 July 1726 the *mutasaddi* of Surat sent his men to arrest Kishan Das Bhatia, the diwan of a deceased noble. Failing to apprehend Kishan Das, they took into custody one of his neighbours. This greatly provoked the Khattris who came to resist the troops. Armed clashes ensued, which led to the suspension of business in the whole town. The situation could return to normal only after Kishan Das agreed to meet the *mutasaddi* personally.⁶¹ Similar evidence is available about the Jains settled in the Gangetic plains,⁶² tending to suggest that close social and cultural ties existed between the mercantile and professional groups.

The impression that various mercantile and professional groups essentially represented the one and the same social category is reinforced by the remarkable extent of geographical mobility among individuals constituting the middle stratum in Mughal India. In many cases migration of individuals from one place to another synchronized with a change in their professions. A well-known example of this kind of two-fold mobility was the stages through which the family of Jagat Seths of Murshidabad rose to prominence. This family originally belonged to Nagaur (Rajasthan). One of their ancestors, Hiranand Shah, a *sarraf* by profession, migrated to Patna and then to Murshidabad towards the middle of the seventeenth century. It was in the course of their moving from Nagaur to Murshidabad that they entered the service of the Mughal state as *khazinedars* (treasurers), which made them so rich and important.⁶³ The history of the family of Banarsidas, the author of the *Ardha-kathanak*, represents yet another case of the same nature, dating back to the sixteenth century.⁶⁴

The way in which members of the family of Jadudas, the first English broker at Surat, got dispersed to different stations where the English had their establishments and sought

to monopolize positions of brokers at all these places is a unique case, pointing to the remarkable degree of geographical mobility existing among the communities specializing in such jobs in the seventeenth century. According to Mundy, in 1632 the English brokers at Surat, Patna, Agra, Broach, and Burhanpur belonged to the same family.⁶⁵ A similar picture emerges from the evidence relating to the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The *Mirat al-Haqaiq* mentions a number of sarrafs of Ahmadabad and Surat serving as diwans or khazinedars in the royal establishments as well as in the sarkars of the nobles at Delhi. An interesting case is that of Banarsidas, who in 1726 was stationed at the court as a wakil, possibly of the commandant of Surat, while his son Bhukandas looked after his family's business at Surat.⁶⁶

A significant aspect of geographical mobility among the groups constituting the professional classes was the tendency on the part of the individuals of the urban intelligentsia serving as officials to move from one place to another in search of suitable employment. During his service career an average accountant, record-keeper, or *insha* writer would be serving in such far-flung places as Kabul, Lahore, Agra, Gujarat, Bengal, and the Deccan. This tendency would stem mainly from three factors: (a) the establishment of a uniform pattern of local administration all over the empire with Persian as the official language; (b) the demand for the services of persons well-versed in accountancy, insha, and record-keeping being greater than the available personnel; and (c) the high degree of freedom that office-workers seem to have enjoyed in relinquishing or accepting a job.

To illustrate the manner in which a person possessing required training in accountancy and Persian insha moved from place to place, frequently changing his employers, we may refer to the career of Surat Singh's brother, Ganga Ram. He was born and brought up at Natesari in the pargana Patti Haibatpur (now Patti in district Amritsar). The first job taken up by Ganga Ram was that of the *waqa'i* 'nigar of Lahore. Subsequently, he became a pargana official in Gujarat. He remained unemployed for some time, but eventually became the 'amil of pargana Jahangirpur (in Punjab), in which position he served for a long time. On leaving Jahangirpur, Ganga Ram accepted a position in the khalisa establishment of pargana Batala. Some time later he shifted from Batala to Bhatinda to serve as the diwan of a certain noble, Rai Todar Mal. At a still later stage he went to Agra as wakil of another noble, Rai Behari Mal. On his return from Agra, he stayed at Lahore for some time and then went to Kabul where he took up service as *khan-i saman* in the sarkar of Safshikan Khan. But within a few months of accepting this employment, he became dissatisfied on account of Safshikan Khan relying too much on the advice of his khazinedar, and left his service. It would appear that towards the end of his career Ganga Ram was in the service of Aqil Khan.⁶⁷

The foregoing discussion of the economic basis of professional groups and the degree of professional and geographical mobility displayed by them in Mughal India goes to identify them as a distinct segment of the middle stratum of medieval Indian society. They were often joined with the merchant and trading communities through caste and family ties. Their incomes came not as a minor share in the land revenue, but as remuneration for their specialized knowledge and the skills they possessed. Evidently, a large market existed for them in the Mughal empire. They appear to have used their specialized knowledge and skills for defrauding the members of the nobility as well as royal establishment on a large scale, giving rise to an antagonistic economic relationship between professional middle groups and the Mughal ruling establishment as such. This antagonism, manifesting itself in the harsh treatment of the revenue and other office staff, seems to have accentuated with the passage of time. As the Mughal imperial system developed serious faults and

then declined rapidly during the first half of the eighteenth century, the professional middle class appear to have become manifestly prosperous and assertive to the extent of rousing, as indicated by Shah Waliullah's remark, the ire of the aimma, the holders of the revenue-free grants, who were predominantly orthodox Muslims.

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- 3 Cf. *Tazkira-i Pir Hassu Teli*, MS, Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, pp. 181b, 151b. For a note on Surat Singh's biography, Athar Ali, 'Sidelight on Ideological and Religious Attitudes in the Punjab during the 17th century', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, XXXI Session, Benaras, 1969, p. 314.
- 4 *Tazkira-i Pir Hassu Teli*, p. 176a.
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- 6 Towards 1730, the salary of an 'amil in the Amber territory ranged from Rs 1,400 per annum in pargana Malarna to Rs 1,600 per annum in pargana Malpura. *Arhsattas, pargana Malarna*, vs 1787/1730, and *Pargana Malpura*, vs 1788/1731.
- 7 *Tazkira-i Pir Hassu Teli*, pp. 75a and b.
- 8 *Mir'at-i Haqaiq*, mainly a diary of an official, Itimad Ali Khan, for about a decade from 18 safar 1130 (21 January 1717) to 27 Jumada I 1139 (19 February 1727). MS, Fraser, no.124, Bodleian Library, Oxford, p. 139a.
- 9 *Shah Waliullah Dehlvi Ke Siyasi Maktubat*, (edited by K.A. Nizami) (Aligarh: 1950), p. 51.
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- 14 Cf. *Muharba-i Muhammad Shah wa Nadir Shah*, MS, Bodleian, Ethe 1/263. Details of extortions from the eleven richer officials are given. Cf. Khan, 'Middle Classes in the Mughal Empire', pp. 119–20, 137, n. 23.
- 15 *Ain-i Akbari* (Nawal Kishore, Lucknow, 1893), vol. I, p. 132. Cf. Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire* (translated by Archibald Constable) (London: 1916), pp. 215–16, This category of officials is included among the 'rauzindars'.
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- 43 *Ardha-kathanak* (translated by R.C. Sharma), *Indica*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 57, 64, 110.
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- 47 Tavernier, *Travels in India* (translated by V. Ball) (London: 1889), pp. 300-1. Cf. Moreland, *India at the Death of Akbar*, p. 79, n. 1; B.B. Misra, *The Indian Middle Classes* (Delhi: 1961), p. 59.
- 48 The total number of 'distinguished' physicians of Akbar's reign mentioned by Abu'l Fazl, Badauni, and Nizam al-Din Ahmad is thirty-nine, while the corresponding figure for Shah Jahan's reign based on the lists given in the *Badshah nama* is only eleven.
- 49 The relative strength of Indians and Persians among the physicians mentioned by the chronicles as serving the king and high nobility under Akbar and Shah Jahan respectively can be gauged from the following chart, which has been prepared with the help of the lists given in the *Ain-i Akbari*, *Tabaqat-i Akbari*, *Muntakhab ut-Tawarikh*, and the *Badshah Nama* of Lahori:

	Persians	Indians	Others	Total
Under Akbar	14	12	13	39
Under Shah Jahan	7	3	1	11

- 50 In the *Mirza-nama*, a satirical treatise compiled by a certain Mirza Kamran (not to be confused with Babur's son) probably sometime during Jahangir's reign (there is a reference to Mirza Rafi' Shirazi, who compiled his book *Tazkirat al-Muluk* in 1017 H/1608-1609, as a contemporary), there is a casual remark advising a *mirza* (gentleman-trooper) that as long as he was in Hindustan, he should avoid falling ill so that he may not be obliged to see the physician of his mansabdar (*tabib-i mansabdarash*). Cf. *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. IX, 1913.
- 51 Brahman, *Maktubat*, p. 31b.
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- 58 Cf. M.A. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion* (New Delhi: 1963 [reprint]), vol. I, pp. 21-2.
- 59 Cf. *Travels of Fray Sabatian Manrique*, cited Misra, *Indian Middle Classes*, pp. 23-4.
- 60 Cf. *Mir'at-i Haqaiq*, p. 355b: On 16 September 1725, I'timdad 'Ali Khan records the razing, by Hamid 'Ali Khan's order, of forty houses at Ahmadabad belonging to rich Khatris.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 430a.

- 62 Cf. *Ardha-kathanak*. Banarsidas's father Kharagsen, who belonged to a family of Jain traders, was serving as a fotedar of four parganas in Bihar during 1563–69. According to Banarsidas, 500 Jains of Singharb gotra were serving as fotedars in the Afghan kingdom of Bengal and Bihar about this time.
- 63 Misra, *Indian Middle Classes*, p. 24.
- 64 *Indica*, vol. 7, nos.1–2.
- 65 Cf. W.H. Moreland, *From Akbar to Aurangzeb*, (London: 1923) reprint New Delhi: 1972, p. 157, n. 1.
- 66 *Mir'at-i Haqaiq*, pp. 482a, 485a.
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CHAPTER 10

Merchants in Medieval India

Shireen Moosvi

I

Information about merchants and their position in society in early medieval times (c. 700–1200) is scattered among literary sources, legal texts, and inscriptions. One is greatly indebted to B.N.S. Yadava for having brought together a large mass of information about merchants, their activities, ambitions and role in society, culled from these sources.¹

It seems to be a mistake to suppose that in this period of 'Indian feudalism', merchants were necessarily held to be some inferior class of society. According to Yashapala (twelfth century), author of the *Maharaja Parajaya*, the very rich merchants (*kotisvaras*, 'crorepatis') had huge banners with bells hoisted on their mansions; they kept large numbers of elephants and horses. Of the merchant-prince Kubera, he tells us that he had 60 million gold coins, 800 *tulas* of silver, 8 *tulas* of valuable jewels, 2,000 *kumbhas* of grain, 2,000 *kharis* of rice, 50,000 horses, 1,000 elephants, 80,000 cows and 500 ploughs, 500 shops, 500 houses, 500 carriages, and 500 carts.² Even if the degree of exaggeration here is unpardonable, one learns what dignity and wealth a rich merchant could aspire to.

The search for wealth, which must motivate all those who pursue commerce, had to be undertaken in early medieval India within a framework of market relations deeply influenced by caste. *Shrenī* is a term usually translated as guild, but, as is well known, it has also the meaning of a sub-caste, as in the caste name Barahseni (*dwadas-shrenī*, the twelve shrenīs), an important Banya community. The actual role the shrenīs as caste organizations played in commercial life is rather obscure, but undoubtedly certain customs and practices could be enforced by them upon their members, to promote a recognition of their identity as well as to work for their mutual benefit. But there could be larger customary forms of cooperation among various castes as well. The Anavada inscription (thirteenth century) from Solanki-ruled Gujarat tells us of the *pancha-mukha-nagara* (the Council of 'Five Great Men of the Town'), which consisted of the 'chief (mercantile) magnates' (*mahajans*), comprising *sadhus* (*sahukars*, bankers), *shreshthis* ('seths', big merchants), *thakurs* (titled merchants),

sonis (goldsmiths), *kanisaras* (braziers), *vaniyarakas* (merchants' factors or agents), and *nau-vittakas* (barge- or shipowners), besides the 'Five' major town officials (*panchakula*) and the *purohitas* (priests).³ It is not necessary to believe, as Yadava suggests, that these were headmen of their respective *shrenīs*. They could have been invited to the 'council' just because of their wealth and influence among their respective castes.

While caste largely determined as to who could pursue the merchant's profession, the merchants' lives were in many ways similar to those of their colleagues in other parts of the world. The great Jain monk of the commercially strategic region of Gujarat, Hemachandra (1088–1172) gives us a vibrant description of how merchants fared when they travelled—an announcement was first made in the town of Kshitipratishtha that Dhana, a principal merchant, would be going with his goods, to Vasantapura. All the merchants who wished to accompany his caravan could assemble at a particular time. As Dhana mounted his chariot, drumbeats announced the departure of the caravan. Camels, oxen, buffaloes, mules, and donkeys carried loads; and carts were also used. Armed guards kept the robbers at bay. Every evening the caravan stopped in the open, under trees or near a pond. Much privation was suffered in the summer, but still more in the rainy season, when the caravan had to stop at one place for a long time—the merchants had to build thatched huts to protect themselves from rain. Supplies were running out by the time the rains ended; but then the caravan could proceed to Vasantapura, where the merchants selling their goods could finally obtain ease of mind.⁴

The carrying trade extended overland: the impression that Indian merchants did not travel or trade with foreign countries is not supported by our evidence. Muhammad Awfi (fl. 1211) in his *Jami'u'l Hikayat* reports that when Muizzuddin of Ghur returned to Ghazni after the failure of his expedition to Gujarat (1178), it was:

represented to him that in Naharwala [Pattan, Gujarat] there resided a certain person by name Wasa Abhir, who was one of the headmen of the city. This man always sent consignments of his merchandize to his agents for sale, and at that time there was property belonging to him in Ghaznin, to the amount of ten lacs of rupees.

Muizzuddin rejected the suggestion that he should seize this property.⁵

Indian merchants could themselves take great risks as well. In the *Kathasaritsagara*, we are told of a Vaishya of Ujjain going to Puskharavati (near Peshawar) along with three merchants. All of them were captured by a Tajik and enslaved, and then sold to another Tajik before being presented to a Turk. They were ultimately set free, but were so alarmed by their experience that they quit north India for the safer pastures of the Deccan.

It is likely that in the overland trade Indian merchants from Multan were already playing an important role. 'Multani' came to mean in Central Asia a Hindu merchant; one, however, does not know when exactly this sense was attributed to the name. But Multani merchants were already very close to the Delhi sultans' court and their nobility in the thirteenth century, as we shall see; and it is very likely that this association had roots in earlier history, since Multan had been under Muslim rulers since c.714.

Not only overland, but overseas too, Indian merchants maintained a presence. Yadava cites the *Jagaducharita*, apparently from Solanki-ruled Gujarat, from which we learn that Jagadu, a merchant, not only regularly traded with Iran, but had an Indian agent at the port of Hormuz.

A fairly developed credit system, with *hundikas* or bills of exchange being widely in use, supported the commercial edifice. The social historian is here naturally less concerned

with their details of credit than with the professional separation between merchant and banker, and the attitude towards usury.

Unfortunately, the evidence on the first of the two questions is not sufficiently clear. One might suppose from later usage that the terms *sahu* or *sahukar* and *mahajan* were specifically applicable to bankers and moneylenders. But the lexic differentiation had apparently not taken place by the twelfth century. Hemachandra refers to *suris* and *sadhus* (=sahus) accompanying Dhana's caravan;⁶ and so they must have been his fellow-merchants.

As for usury, there was no legal disapproval of it, but there was a tendency to recommend lower rates, such as 15 per cent per annum. But the rate treated as normal in the famous collection of Gujarat documents, the *Lekhapaddhati*, is as high as 2 per cent per month or 24 per cent per annum at the simple rate.⁷

II

If one now looks at the Muslim juridical position on commerce, it is certainly favourable to commerce in that there are no restrictions on inter-professional mobility, the guiding principle being not status but contract. But two prohibitions are important: that of *ihtikār* or hoarding for profit, and *riba'* or usury.⁸ The latter provision of law might well be one reason why credit instruments, deposit banking, and insurance could not develop in sophisticated forms in the medieval Islamic world. Here, it would be interesting to consider how the coexistence between the commercial and financial system of Hindu merchants and bankers, evolving their credit and financial instruments freely on the basis of their own customs, and the *milieu* of Muslim merchants, with their ranks more open to outsiders, might have contributed much to progress of commerce in medieval India.

The Ghorid conquest of northern India and establishment of the Delhi sultanate by providing impetus to the growth of towns and the expansion of commerce may then be considered as even the harbinger of better fortunes for merchants and merchant-usurers. It is the burden of the historian Ziya Barani's complaint that in the late thirteenth century the Hindu Sahas and Multanis were so affluent that even the nobles were indebted to them for loans against drafts on their territorial assignments.⁹

The well-known Palam Baoli inscription of Balban's reign serves as a good illustration of the affluence of this class as well as their perception of Turkish rule. Uddhara, whose father Haripala was from Uchh near Multan, built a stepped-well at Palam in Delhi in August 1276, leaving a record of it in an inscription in Sanskrit, composed by one Pandita Yogishwara, engraved on it.¹⁰

The construction of this stepped-well was not the only act of benevolence by Uddhara; he is reported to have built a number of *dharamshalas* (free inns) at different places. He maintained three wives and had seven sons and four daughters. The first wife Jajla gave birth to three sons and one daughter, and the second Rajashri to four sons and three daughters: the names of almost all the sons as well as daughters prefixed with adjectives are duly mentioned in the inscription. No offspring of the third wife Ratandevi is mentioned. Strikingly enough, women of the family are not held in disdain, but seem to get due notice. The genealogy of Uddhara's mother Chandi is given side by side with the genealogy of his father and, interestingly enough, women are not praised for their beauty and physical charm, but for 'wisdom', 'will', 'energy', and 'intelligence'.

These well-off Multanis in Delhi, by now, appear to have status enough to get genealogical accounts of them prepared. The composer of the Palam Baoli inscription thus

declares with some pride that the detailed genealogies of Uddhara's parents, father Haripala, and mother Chandi are properly recorded in the genealogical work of the time entitled *Vanṣhāvalī*. One thus has to agree with Barani that Multanis and Sahas enjoyed high status and lived in much comfort. It was, therefore, not unnatural for them to be well disposed towards the reigning sultans. The inscription, which begins with an invocation and salutation to Ganpati, Om, and Shiva, goes on to the heights of exaggeration in praise of Balban, and attributes to him an imaginary sway from Bengal to Ghazni and from the extreme south to the north. Regarding the quality of administration and the level of protection provided, it asserts:

The earth being now supported by this sovereign, Shīsha [Naga], altogether forsaken his duty of supporting the weight of the globe, has betaken himself to the great bed of Vishnu; and Vishnu himself, for the sake of protection, taking Lakhshmi on his breast, and relinquishing all worries, sleeps in peace on the ocean of milk.

This eulogy in all probability went unnoticed by the sultan and his administration, but its anxiety to accord with the official view is so strong that in the very accurate list of the sultans from Shihabuddin Ghori to Ghiyasuddin Balban, the name of Aram Shah, who was officially considered a usurper and not a recognized sultan, is omitted.

The prosperity of these Multani merchants and their amicable relationship with the state seem to have continued with the Delhi sultanate during the fourteenth century as well. Alauddin Khalji (1296–1316) entrusted by way of capital loans some 2 million silver *tankas* to the Multanis to bring commodities from distant places to Delhi.¹¹

The participation of Hindu merchants in the trade and their favourable attitude towards the Delhi sultanate was not confined to Multanis who generally carried long distance trade in goods of high value. We come to know of two well-off Banya merchant families in the vicinity of Delhi during Muhammad Tughlaq's reign through the inscriptions they have left, engraved on the wells built by them in 1327 and 1328.¹²

Sridhara was a rich merchant of the Rohitka (Rohatgis)¹³ sub-caste of banyas, whose ancestor, the merchant Govindadeva, is said to have settled at Narayana. Besides providing his brief geneology, his inscription helpfully informs us that his father Srivara, a successful Vaishnavite merchant, had two beautiful, high-born wives, Kallya and Ganga, from whom he had three sons, Sridhara himself being the elder son of the second wife. The genealogy here remains confined to the male offspring and the birth of daughters has not been considered of consequence enough to get any mention. This inscription too, beginning with the usual invocation of Om and salutations to Ganesha, and other gods and goddesses, showers encomiums on Muhammad Tughlaq, the reigning sultan, the 'crest jewel of all the rulers of the earth'. There were two other contemporary well-off merchant brothers, Khetala and Paitala, who too dug a well 'for the atonement of their ancestors and continuation of their race' at a village Saravala in the vicinity of Delhi, where they were said to have possessed a large plot of land. Their family is claimed to have come originally from Agrataka (Agroha)¹⁴ and settled down in Delhi for five generations. Here too, except for Viro, the mother of Khetala and Paitala, no other woman is mentioned. Besides gods, they appeared to venerate Brahmans and gurus. Muhammad Tughlaq's name is given as the reigning sultan in a brief history of Delhi that the inscription provides.

References to Muslim merchants in the Delhi sultanate, stray as they are, nevertheless give us some valuable glimpses into their mode of life and position in society. Shaikh Nizamuddin is reported to have narrated that in 1241 a group of the Muslim merchants of Lahore went to sell their merchandise in Gujarat where they first demanded very high

prices, but after bargaining, settled for even less than half of the initially stated price. This invited much ridicule from the Hindu merchants of Gujarat who found the practice strange.¹⁵ Some Multani merchants were Muslim as well. There appears a detailed complaint by Mahru, governor of Multan under Firoz Tughlaq, that in spite of strict admonitions they violated the Muslim law against hoarding, causing hardship to common people.¹⁶ Qāzī Ḥamiduddin Multani, a trusted minister (*Shaikh-ul Islām* and *ṣadr*) of Alauddin Khalji, had the title of '*Malik-ut Tujjār*' (prince of the merchants), by which he is invariably referred to by Hamid Qalandar, author of the *Khair-ul Majālis* (composed in 1354),¹⁷ suggesting that he combined his official duties with trading activities. Hamid Qalandar records his having introduced a Multani merchant who was a pious Muslim and a relation of his to Shaikh Nasiruddin Chiragh.¹⁸ A son of the governor of Multan, Mahru, was a merchant for whom Mahru wrote a recommendatory letter to *Malik-ul' Umara* Tajuddin Muhammad Haji, seeking assistance in the sale and purchase of horses and other merchandise by him. Evidently, it was not uncommon for the members of the sultanate nobility to participate in commerce; rather, trade was deemed a respectable occupation. In fact, Shaikh Nasiruddin once stated that 'there is no livelihood better than trade'.¹⁹ He commends a merchant of Delhi, Rashid Bandat, for his total concentration on his business. He relates approvingly that once Rashid Bandat, sitting in his shop situated in the ground storey of his house, became so engrossed in his accounts that in spite of insistent reminders from his maid-slave, he forgot to even have his meal and kept telling her, unmindfully, to wait until the food had gone totally cold but still remained oblivious of his hunger. He helpfully adds that in Delhi the usual practice of the merchants was that they had double-storey buildings, the lower storey used as their shop and the upper as their residence.²⁰

While some merchants could enter the sultanate nobility, some others were known for their religious learning and piety. Qāzī Ḥamiduddin Multānī, Baranī's contempt for him notwithstanding,²¹ was a theologian of sufficient status to be '*Shaikh-ul Islām*' along with that of being '*Malik-ut Tujjār*'.²² A very wealthy cloth merchant of Ayodhya, Khwaja Khujandagi, was a close companion of Shaikh Nasiruddin at the Friday mosque at Ayodhya, of whom he had fond memories. Khujandagi had memorized the *Quran* and used to distribute alms to the needy and to fill ant-holes with sugar and rapeseed on his way to the mosque. He dealt in a coarse variety of cloth (*pat*), mainly carrying it to Delhi, by the river route, and refused to deal in finer cloth in spite of higher profit because according to him 'the coarse cloth was the dress of the poor and saints, while the finer varieties were worn by the soldiers and the Turks'. Once a boat carrying his consignment sank in the Yamuna at a ferry point at Delhi, but he remained unperturbed declaring that since he had paid *zakat* (religious dues on wealth) scrupulously, no loss could occur to him. Incidentally, the lost consignment was recovered. Once a slave of his escaped after stealing a substantial amount of his sale proceeds at Delhi, but was nabbed by the kotwāl of Karra at an ale-house with the entire stolen money except for seven gold tankas that he had squandered away; these seven gold tankas were considered rather a paltry part of the stolen amount.²³

Trade in cloth was perhaps quite lucrative at Ayodhya (Awadh). Shaikh Nasiruddin mentions another Muslim cloth merchant of Ayodhya who gave '5000 or 6000 tankas' being one-fourth of ready cash with him at that moment, to a theologian, Maulana Daud, to pray for the recovery of his only son from a serious illness.²⁴ Yet another friend of Shaikh Nasiruddin called Shamsuddin, an affluent cloth merchant, decided to renounce the world, whereupon he first joined the circle of disciples of Shaikh Nizamuddin and later became a *durvaish*.²⁵

Muslim merchants were, of course, not only confined to cloth trade. We also hear of a devout merchant, Saiyadi Salih, who was introduced to Shaikh Nasiruddin as the 'chief merchant [*mahtar*] of the jewel market'.²⁶ A friend of Mahru at Multan, Khwaja Ali Kamal Dalbani, was a leading sugar merchant known for his hoarding practices: he became a bitter enemy of Mahru when the latter as governor took action against this unlawful practice.²⁷

III

Another medieval community of merchants deserves our attention. The long-distance trade in goods of bulk was mainly carried on by the famous caste of Banjāras.²⁸ We first hear of them during the reign of Alauddin Khalji (1296–1316). Barani refers to them as *kārwanīs* ('people of caravans') and one can infer from his description that they were nomads and moved with their 'women and children, oxen and cattle' and had their own headmen (*muqaddams*) designated *nayakas*.²⁹

The fact that the *nayakas* were really the chiefs or headmen of the Banjaras also emerges from Kabir's allegorical verse (1500) about 'one *nayaka*, five Banjaras with twenty-five oxen laden with bauble'.³⁰ Nasiruddin further says, 'These are people who bring foodgrains to the city [Delhi] from various parts. Some bring ten thousand [laden] oxen, others twenty thousand.'³¹

This description matches well with those given in the seventeenth century, when Emperor Jahangir (1605–27) tells us that, 'In this country the Banjaras are a fixed class of people, who possess a thousand oxen, or more or less, varying in numbers. They bring grain from the villages to the towns, and also accompany armies.'³²

Peter Mundy calls the moving assemblage of Banjaras a 'Tanda' and says:

Theis Banjares carrie all their howsehold along with them, as wives and children, one Tanda consisting of many families. Their course of life is somewhat like carriers, continually driving from place to place. . . . There may bee in such a Tanda 6 or 700 persons, men, women and children. There men are very lustie, there weomen hardie, whoe in occasion of fight, lay about them like men. Theis people go dispersedly driving their laden Oxen before them, their Journey not above 6 or 7 miles a day att most, and that in the Coole.

He adds:

Their Oxen are their own. They are sometymes hired by Merchants, but most commonly they are the Merchants themselves, buyinge of graine where it is Cheape to be had, and carryinge it to places where it is dearer, and from thence again relade themselves with anything that will yield benefitt in other places as Salt, Sugar, Butter, etts.³³

This statement suggests that the Banjaras normally traded on their own account though perhaps they also acted as factors of great merchant-bankers (*sāhus*) and at times depended on credit since there are verses in the *Guru Granth Sahib* to the effect that God like a *sāhu* lives in a palace and is served by millions of Banjaras in whose hands the 'capital [*mul*] diminishes, while the interest [*biaju*] [due to the *sāhu*] ever increases', if they are not careful and honest.³⁴

Not much information is forthcoming about the customs of the Banjaras. Tavernier is our only source in this regard. He tells us that they were divided into 'four tribes' distinguished by the goods they carried, namely, corn, rice, pulse, and salt. They were 'idolators' (Hindus), and had priests and a serpent-like idol carried on a staff on a special ox. Their women tattooed themselves from the waist upwards.³⁵ The four-fold division is

not substantiated from any other source. It is true that some Banjara communities were traditionally associated with trade in particular commodities, like the Labans with salt, there is much evidence to indicate that most of them carried trade in anything which was profitable. Moreover, at least according to the 1891 census, not an insignificant number of the Banjaras in the North-Western Provinces was Muslim.

IV

The main important and large merchant caste in northern India was that of Banyas, for which much information comes from the seventeenth century. The community consisted of numerous sub-castes transcending religious affiliations. They controlled practically the whole inland trade and credit system. The Banyas had in each locality a shop where they engaged in both selling to and buying from peasants and artisans and served as the universal usurers. To the impecunious, God and the Banya were almost synonymous. Hence, Kabir (c.1510) said: 'My Lord is a Banya. He conducts his commerce so easily without scales and balances, he weighs the entire Universe.'³⁶ Abul Fazl mentions forty-eight sub-castes of the Banyas;³⁷ however, Ovington (1696) speaks of twenty-four: 'Among Banians are reckoned 24 Castes, or Sects, who both refrain from indiscriminate mixture in marriages, and from eating together in common.'³⁸

The *M'irāt-i Aḥmadi* (1761) gives the actual names of the forty-eight sub-castes of Hindu and Jain Banyas of Gujarat and further adds that they were 'mostly named after places, villages and settlements.'³⁹ But this did not impose any restrictions on their mobility or areas of activity. The Oswals from Osi in Marwar spread out all over northern India in the seventeenth century. The great merchant of Ahmedabad (Gujarat) and jeweller of emperor Shah Jahan (1628–58), Santidas Sāhu was an Oswal.⁴⁰ They are not only reported trading at Agra, but also had a quarter to themselves even in the small city of Fatehpur, west of Allahabad, as reported by a small merchant of Jaunpur, Banarsidas (writing in 1641). Banarsidas himself was of the Srimal sub-caste and traced his sept Biholia to Biholi, near Rohtak. He was himself born at Jaunpur (eastern UP) and married into a family of Srimals settled at Khairabad (in UP).

The Banyas of different sub-castes freely formed partnerships with each other. Thus, Banarsidas's father Kharagasen, a Srimal and a Jain, was a partner in the jewel trade at Jaunpur, of Ramdas, an Agarwal and a worshipper of Lord Shiva, a jewel merchant of Agra. Banarsidas himself made partnership with Dharamdas, an Oswal, at Agra, he later acted as a factor for a sāhu (banker, merchant) of the Mauthia sub-caste.⁴¹

There was apparently some sort of a bond of solidarity among the Banya community, which perhaps was another factor for their success. One finds that at Surat in 1616, upon a grievance, the entire community closed down shops and threatened to leave the city

through some vyolence done by him to a chiefe Bannyane, the whole multitude assembled, shutt up their shopps, and (as their custome), after a generall complaynt to the Governor lefte the cittie, pretendeing to goe to the courte for justice.⁴²

This was not the only instance of their united action. In 1666, again in Surat, on a dispute with the qāzī, the community showed the same solidarity:

The Bannians having bound themselves under severe penalties not to open any of their shops without orders from their Mahager [*mahājan*] or Generall Councill, there was not any provisions to be got; the tanksall (mint) and customshouse shut; no money to be procured.⁴³

Their expertise in the profession was perhaps the main factor behind their strength in such situations. Linschoten (1583–89) had earlier said of them:

They are most subtile and expert in casting of accounts and writing, so that they do not only surpass and go beyond all other Indians and other nations thereabouts, but also the Portugales [Portuguese], and, in this respect, they have much advantage, for that they are very perfect in the trade of merchandise, and very readie to deceive men.⁴⁴

The assessment is shared by Manucci writing more than a hundred years later:

If the talk is of business, they [Banyas] give a ready answer and are such strong arithmeticians that in the shortest time they can make any sort of calculation, never making a mistake of a single figure.⁴⁵

Tavernier gives us greater details as to how they came to possess such skills:

The members of this caste are so subtle and so skilful in trade that ... they could give lessons to the most cunning Jews. They accustom their children at an early age to shun slothfulness, and instead of letting them go into the streets, teach them arithmetic which they learn perfectly, using for it neither pens nor counters, but the memory alone, so that in a moment they will do a sum however difficult it may be. They are always with their fathers, who instruct them in trade, and do nothing without at the same time explaining it to them. These are the figures which they use in their books, both in the Empire of the Great Mogul, as well as in other parts of India, although the languages may vary.⁴⁶

Their much commended expertise in arithmetic, accountancy, and methods of business served them particularly well when they acted as *ṣarrāfs* (money-changers and bankers), or as brokers to merchants and officials. Their services were indispensable where currencies of different countries, metals, and denominations circulated. The practice of brokerage too was a Banya speciality on which numerous foreign merchants commented: indeed, Muslim merchants in India usually had Banya brokers; and they similarly had a monopoly over money-changing and banking.⁴⁷

It was not only in India that the Banyas were indispensable as *ṣarrāfs* and brokers. They were present nearly in all the trading ports and towns of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. The settlements of the Banya merchants, mainly from Kathiawar in Gujarat, are reported at Aden, Mocha, and other ports.⁴⁸ At Gambroon (Bandar Abbas) and in a number of towns in Iran such as Shiraz, Kirman, Kashan, Isfahan, Tabriz, and Ardabil, the Banyas had their own quarters in bazars.⁴⁹ They were not only employed by the Dutch, but also by the Iranian merchants as their trusted brokers and bankers.⁵⁰

It, therefore, does not seem at all possible to agree with K.N. Chaudhuri's statement that 'it was unusual for a Hindu merchant to conduct business with a Muslim'.⁵¹ Contemporary Persian documentary evidence reveals the picture of a world diametrically opposite to the one Chaudhuri envisages. Hindu and Muslim merchants of Surat not only did business with one another, but jointly owned cargo as well as the cargo-loading boats. In 1643 the imperial ship *Ganjāwar* was being loaded to sail for Jeddah and it carried the cargo of both Hindu and Muslim merchants:

Dastak to *Upārī* [officer] of *Ganjāwar*, 1643:

'One *jalīha* of Abdul Wahab and Manikji according to the regulation of Malikh[?] has been dispatched for [loading] aboard the auspicious ship. Let it be accepted [and loaded]. Dated 24 *Z'iqad*, 1052 [= 13 February 1643].'

Dustak to Upāri of the ship Ganjāwar, 1643:

'One *tauri* with cargo belonging to Hari Dar, Donki, Haniya, Dabash, Aziz Beg and Mulla Jalal has been loaded and dispatched. It should be checked with record and loaded aboard the ship. Dated Zilhij, 1052, R.Y. 16 [= March 1643].'

Some eighty years later Surat offered a still more striking instance of collaboration. In December 1722 Ahmad Chalebi, Abdur Rahman, and other merchants laid a charter of demands before Momin Khan, the customer (*mutasaddi*) of Surat on behalf of 'the *mahājans* [Hindu bankers] and the people of the Port of Surat'. Wherever these concerned specific individuals, these were invariably non-Muslims: Shahpur Parsi, seller of *ilacha*-cloth; Manikchand and Shahar *baqqals* [Banyas]; in other grievances, the *mahājans* and *sahukārs* are specifically mentioned as those aggrieved. In July 1726 'Mulla Muhammad, and Ahmad Chalebi and other merchants' of Surat again banded together to represent the grievances of 'cloth merchants and *biyuparis*' among others, this time to the castellan of Surat. When the nephew of the castellan gave a reception to leading merchants to confirm a reconciliation, the list of guests included nine named Muslims and five Hindus, with many not named.⁵⁴

At the same time, we find the classes of merchants and bankers so far separated that in 1715 at Ahmedabad, there was the possibility of an armed clash between merchants headed by Kapurchand Bhansali, seth, and bankers headed by Madan Gopal.⁵⁵

The Mughal era no doubt opened new vistas for the Indian merchants and they were now found controlling large sectors of trade in the Red Sea, Iran, Central Asia, and South-East Asia. Foreign travellers were often dazzled by the wealth of Indian merchants. Sebastian Manrique in the 1630s spoke of the 'immense wealth or fortunes' of the merchants at Agra. At the great port of Surat even the English East India Company found itself dwarfed by the local merchants Virji Vora, Zahid Beg, and, later on, Mulla Ghafur.

By 1619 Virji Vora⁵⁶ was so well established that the factors of the English East India Company were obliged to give 'courteous usage of all English ships' to his agent 'Hacka' Parikh. The Company was in constant debt to him and had just then taken a loan of 25,000 *mahmūdīs* (16 *mahmūdīs* = 1 rupee) from him. He had practically monopolized the pepper trade and dealt in a wide range of commodities. His trading network was extensive with headquarters at Surat, he had branches at Broach, Baroda, Ahmedabad, Burhanpur, Golkunda, and, Agra, and in Malabar, besides in the port towns in the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, and South-East Asia. His capital in time grew to an estimated 8 million rupees (or, at contemporary exchange values, 800,000 pounds starting). He bought opium and cotton from local merchants, exchanged these for pepper in south India and the Spice Islands and sold the pepper to the English and Dutch, buying from them coral, quicksilver, vermilion, lead, and other such commodities. In 1625 he sold to the English pepper worth 10,000 pounds at a rate appreciably higher, and compelled them to sell their coral (twenty-five chests) to him at a price much lower than the usual market rate. In achieving such advantageous transactions, he was aided by his intelligence network, beating the English in the present instance by ordering his agents to buy all the stock of pepper at a rate a little higher than the one offered by the English. The English factors ruefully complained in 1643 that Virji Vora 'knoweth that we must sell and soe beats us down till we come to his own rates; and thus hath been his proceedings this many years'. Indeed, such was his domination of the market that 'no merchants in the towns dare displease him by coming to our howse to look uppon our commodities'. In 1662 he prevented the Surat merchants from buying coral and copper from the English by a kind of general diktat.

Virji Vora exploited his position as banker (*ṣarrāf*) as well to assist him in his trade. Since the foreign companies constantly faced a shortage of capital, Virji Vora used this handicap of the English and the Dutch to his full advantage by not only charging them high rates of interest on loans, but also by attaching many more strings to the loans. In 1628, when the English refused to carry goods belonging to him and other Surat merchants to the Persian Gulf ports, Virji Vora and Hari Vaishya, another major merchant of Surat, asked for an immediate repayment of their loans to them amounting to 30,000 pounds, whereupon the English at once submitted. In 1632 the Dutch, who were indebted to Virji Vora to the tune of 8,000 pounds, had a similar experience. Often Virji Vora, by being ready to lend large sums, induced the English and Dutch to borrow from him even though he charged interest at 12 per cent per annum as against the usual 7 per cent per annum, as happened in 1635 and again in 1636, when he exacted 3 per cent extra in lieu of the difference between the newly coined *sikka* and older coins (*chalni*). The English bitterly described him as a 'Costly Creditor'.

Virji Vora conducted his commercial activities in an environment of 'free trade' with little use of administrative support. But he was influential enough even to get Mughal governors of Gujarat transferred, as happened in the case of Masihuz Zaman in 1635, when Virji Vora was summoned by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan to represent his case. Virji Vora's firm survived him and his grandson Nanchand was considered an important merchant in the 1670s, when the firm had lent large sums to the newly-established French East India Company.

Of merchants of other communities we happen to know less, but the operations of many of them were on no mean scale either. In the last quarter of the seventeenth century Mulla Ghafur held the stage.⁵⁷ His capital was mainly invested in shipping. Around 1700 he was said to own twenty ships each of between 300 and 800 tonnes, and to drive a trade equal to that of the English East India Company.

There is no doubt that if there was a dazzling world of trade with high profits, competition, and cooperation, there were also the uncertainties and risks, especially for the lower- and middle- ranking members of the mercantile community, as a number of documents from the seventeenth century relating mainly to Surat show us.⁵⁸ The uncertainties of life and career for those involved in foreign trade were so great that special safeguards became necessary in marriage contracts (*nikāḥnāma*) against the husband's long absence (varying, in the documents studied, from six months to two years) during which he might fail to provide maintenance to his wife. If a merchant took his family along, there were difficulties too. We learn of a merchant who took his wife and daughter along to Achin. The merchant died and his slave fraudulently took his wife into marriage with himself: the wife could not get justice in spite of the ruler of Achin ready to punish him since the other Indian merchants at Achin intervened on his behalf. Brought back to Surat by the slave himself, the daughter was still fighting after the death of her mother and the slave for getting her claims to her father's property admitted.⁵⁹

The practice of marriage dower (*mihr*) providing some financial safeguards to the wife was, therefore, important in mercantile life. The practice of giving mihr among Gujarati merchants became so prevalent that even Hindu merchants gave marriage dower to their wives. Thus Sundar Dar Baqqal (Banya), son of Mathura, purchased a house in Cambay at a price of 701 rupees in 1666 to give in payment of mihr to his wife Sundar Bai, daughter of Gokul Baqqal.⁶⁰

It will be quite ambitious to try to set down all that we know of the social life of merchants in Mughal India, and it cannot certainly be fulfilled within a single chapter.

Enough has been said, I hope, to show that Indian merchants lived in a world where the constraints of caste and community were severely modified by the environment of free trade and economic mobility. Caste and community organizations were tailored to help members succeed in such an environment; and merchants outside that framework, such as Muslims or Armenians, learnt to make use of it for their own advantage. One cannot, therefore, view the Indian mercantile world at the time as stagnant or unchanging in terms of Max Weber's analysis simply because the caste system, ideally considered, precludes all mobility. Nor can one see much signs of a despotic and arbitrary royal despotism throttling commercial enterprise, as W.H. Moreland had thought. The great wealth of men like Virji Vora and Mulla Ghafur could not have been accumulated had such despotism existed. The commercial classes were certainly not the dominant classes in pre-colonial Indian society, but this does not mean that they were not important or without a voice.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Cf. B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century* (Allahabad: 1973), pp. 270–88.
- 2 Cited in *ibid.*, p. 285.
- 3 *Indian Antiquity*, XLI, p. 20.
- 4 Hemachandra, *Trishashtishalaka-purusha-charita*, quoted by Yadava, *Society and Culture*, pp. 276–7.
- 5 H.M. Elliot and J. Dowson, *History of India as Told by its Own Historians* (London: 1867–77), p. 201. The term 'rupees' could not have been used in the original, and is a translator's rendering of something like 'silver coins'.
- 6 Cited in Yadava, *Society and Culture*, p. 281.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 277.
- 8 Cf. Reuben Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam* (Cambridge: 1957), pp. 255–6.
- 9 Barani, *Tarikh-i Firozshahi*, (edited by Saiyid Ahmad Khan) (Calcutta: 1862), p. 120.
- 10 For the text, translation, and earlier notices see Pushpa Prasad, *Sanskrit Inscriptions of Delhi Sultanate 1191–1526* (Delhi: 1990), pp. 3–15.
- 11 Barani, *Tarikh-i Firozshahi*, p. 311.
- 12 For text and translation, see Prasad, *Sanskrit Inscriptions*, pp. 22–7, 27–31.
- 13 For Rohitkas, see W. Grooke, 'The Tribes and Castes of Northern', *Western India*, IV, p. 242.
- 14 For Agroha in the district of Hissar, its claimed connection with one Raja Agarsen and Agarwals, a sub-caste of banyas, see Elliot and Beams, *Memoirs of North-Western Provinces in India*, (London: 1867), pp. 324–7. The identification of Agrotaka with Agroha has been suggested by Prasad, *Sanskrit Inscriptions*, p. 28.
- 15 *Fawaid-ul Fuad* (conversation of Shaikh Nizamuddin of Delhi, recorded [1307–22] by Amir Hasan Sijzi) (edited by Latif Malik), (Lahore: 1966), pp. 201–2.
- 16 *Insha-i Mahru* (edited by Sh. Abdur Rashid and M.B. Husain) (Lahore: 1965), pp. 71–3.
- 17 *Khair-ul Majalis* (conversations of Shaikh Nasiruddin Mahmud, recorded [c.1354] by Hamid Qalandar) (edited by K.A. Nizami) (Aligarh: 1959), p. 241.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 182.
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 *Ibid.*, pp. 92–3. The practice seems to continue at least down to the seventeenth century as Bernier (1663–64) found the merchants at Delhi having their well-ventilated comfortable residences on top and their shops below on the ground floor (F. Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire AD 1656–68*, [translated by A. Constable, revised by V.A. Smith] [London: 1934], pp.248–9. This offers a sharp contrast to the practice at Cambay where an analysis of surviving sale deeds (National Archives of India, 2095) show that the houses of the ordinary merchants during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were exclusively residential and separated from their shops. There also seems no tendency among ordinary Cambay merchants to have an exclusive locality to themselves. (For a detailed analysis see, Jawaid Akhtar, 'Merchants and Urban Property: A Study of Cambay Documents of the 17–18th Centuries', Indian History Congress, XLIX Session, 1998.

- 21 Barani, *Tarikh-i Firozshahi*, p. 324. Barani contemptuously calls him 'Multani bachcha'.
- 22 *Khair-ul Majalis*, p. 241.
- 23 Ibid, pp. 182–4.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid., p. 146.
- 26 Ibid., pp. 94–5.
- 27 *Insha-i Mahru*, p. 72.
- 28 For an exhaustive discussion on Banjaras and Banyas, see Irfan Habib, 'Merchant Communities in Pre-Colonial India', in James Tracy (ed.), *The Rise of Merchant Empires* (Cambridge: 1993).
- 29 Barani, *Tarikh-i Firozshahi*, pp. 305–7.
- 30 *Guru Granth Sahib* (Devanagari text) (Amritsar: Gurudwara Prabandbak Committee) vol. II, p. 1194.
- 31 *Khair-ul Majalis*, p. 241.
- 32 *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri* (edited by Syed Ahmad) (Ghazipur and Aligarh: 1863–64), p. 345.
- 33 *Travels of Peter Mundy* (edited by R.C. Temple) (1628–34), vol. II ('Travels in Asia'), pp. 95–6.
- 34 *Guru Granth Sahib*, vol. I, pp. 22, 180–81, 430.
- 35 Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India* (translated by V. Ball, revised by W. Crooke) (London: 1925), vol. I, pp. 33–5.
- 36 *Kabir Granthavali* (edited by Shyamsundardas) (Kashi: V.S. 2008), p. 62.
- 37 *Ain-i Akbari* (edited by H. Blochman) (Calcutta: 1867–77), vol. II, p. 57.
- 38 J. Ovington, *A Voyage to Surat in the Year 1689* (edited by H.G. Rawbinson) (London: 1929), p. 168.
- 39 Ali Muhammad Khan, *Mirat-i Ahmadi* (edited by Nawab Ali) (Baroda: 1930), Supplement, pp.132, 137–9.
- 40 D. Tripathi, *The Dynamics of a Tradition* (New Delhi: 1981), p. 9.
- 41 *Ardha-kathanak* (edited and translated under the title *Half a Tale* by Mukund Lath) (Jaipur: 1981).
- 42 W. Foster, *A Supplementary Calendar of Documents in the India Office, &c., 1600–1640* (London: 1928), p. 68.
- 43 W. Foster, *English Factories in India, 1668–69* (London) p. 192.
- 44 *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies* (from the old English translation of 1598) (edited by E.C. Burnall) (London: 1885), vol. I, pp. 252–3.
- 45 N. Manucci, *Storia do Mogor* (translated by W. Irvine) (London; 1907), vol. I, p. 156.
- 46 Tavernier, *Travels in India*, vol. II, pp.143–4.
- 47 Habib, 'Merchant Communities in Precolonial India', pp. 392–6.
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CHAPTER 11

Zamindars

Irfan Habib

The term 'zamīndār' is a Persian word of Indian mintage, going back to the early fourteenth century. The suffix *dār* from the verb *dāshtan*, 'to hold, keep, possess, control', has a very wide range of meanings (compare *faujdār*, 'one who commands a *fauj* or force'; *chaukīdār*, 'one who holds a *chauki* or guard-post', that is, a watchman). *Zamīndār* can therefore be any person, who exercises some control over a territory, from a chief to a person who has some rights over a piece of land. In a fourteenth-century Persian dictionary the word is defined as equivalent to *marzbān*, chief or ruler of a territory; and it is in this sense that the term is used in historical texts of that time.¹ But in a proclamation of Fīroz Tughluq of 1353, the class of *zamīndārs* is held to comprise people like *muqaddams* (headmen), *mafrozīs* (men appointed to control land and pay tax over it), and *maliks* (land grantees generally exempted from tax), or, in other words, all persons who held any superior right over the land, of whatever kind.²

The term seems to have become dormant in the fifteenth century, but revived in the reign of Akbar (1556–1605). From the later years of his reign onwards, it seems to have received a kind of official recognition. This is signified by its use in Abul Fazl's *Ā'in-i Akbarī* (1595) in the account of the provinces of the empire, where under the heading 'zamīndār' (or the synonymous 'būmī') are given, for each locality (*pargana*) or sometimes for each district (*sarkār*), the names of castes, clans, and communities to which the local *zamīndārs* belonged. During the seventeenth century the term became universal throughout the Mughal empire, so that those who were often earlier called *khots* in the Doab, or the holders of *satārahī* or *biswī* rights in Awadh and of *vanth* in Gujarat, or *bhumīyas* in Rajasthan and Sind, or held the offices or titles of *chaudharīs*, *desāīs* (in the Dakhin and Gujarat) or *muqaddams*, came to be designated *zamīndārs*, as if the Mughal administration was trying to press different kinds of right-holders, from chiefs to village headmen, into a single mould.³ While one cannot discount a degree of pressure from the state that affected the composition and nature of rights of the various elements now brought under the name *zamindar*, the fact to be underlined is that all these diverse components of the officially designated *zamīndār* class had in actual fact a number of fundamental elements in common. They

drew their rights by inheritance (or purchase), and not normally by a grant from the state; this right consisted of a claim generally laid on the actual cultivator, apart from, though often side by side with, the land tax and cesses levied by the state and its officials; and the zamīndārs could maintain armed retainers to impose their demands upon the peasantry subject to them.⁴ Despite much variation, these features were as true for the earlier period when a universal designation like that of the zamīndār was not in use as when the class had been officially demarcated and given a name. It is obvious, however, that the term zamīndār cannot itself tell us how the class came into being.

Of its origins we may learn more from the list of zamīndār castes, given locality-wise in the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*. Here, we find that in northern India, to which the list is largely confined, the Rajputs constituted a major portion. This may, for example, be seen in Elliot's 1844 map of the old North-Western Provinces (the present Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, and part of Haryana, excluding Awadh of pre-1856 boundaries), showing 'zameendaree possession according to the Ayeen-i Akbaree'.⁵ We are therefore likely to know much about how the class originated if we can explore the evolution of the Rajput castes.

The Sanskrit word *rājaputra* means a prince ('the son of a king'); and this sense doubtless continues to occur in formal literature and also in inscriptions in early medieval times.⁶ But already in the Bakhshali MS, a mathematical text of the seventh century, the *rājaputras* appear to be men who receive daily pay from the king.⁷ We have a very significant statement in the Arab narrations contained in the *Chachnāma* of the battle between the ruler of Sind, Dahar, and the invading Arab army in 712–13. When Dahar went out to face the Arabs, he was preceded by 'a cavalry of five thousand "sons of kings" (*ibnā al-mulūk*)'.⁸ The Arabic expression is clearly a translation of *rājaputra*, but these horsemen could not, by their number, be sons of the ruler or even his kinsmen. They were obviously picked horsemen in his employ. The Arab narrative makes an important suggestion when it tells us that the chiefs of the Jats, a community of low status in Sind, were not allowed to ride horses with saddles (*zīn*).⁹ Though the exact time of the arrival of the saddle in India is uncertain, it began to be used in Europe in the early centuries of the Christian era;¹⁰ and the *Chachnama* may well be giving us the first clue to its presence here in India by the eighth century. From its reference, however, it will be seen that the saddle had its role not only in the firm seat it provided to the horseman, but also as a status symbol. In all likelihood the *rājaputras* (the *ibnā al-mulūk*), being horsemen of status, rode saddled horses.

Somadeva's *Kathāsaritsāgara*, composed in Kashmir between 1063 and 1081, shows the *rājaputras* as mercenary soldiers of some status.¹¹ There is much evidence to the same effect in Kalhana's *Rājatarangini* (1149–50), the great history of Kashmir. In an early reference, relating to an incident of the eighth century, the *rājaputra* could be both a prince and a notable warrior.¹² But early in the eleventh century the sense of warrior is clear. The *rājaputras* lead the Kashmiri army sent to assist Shāhī Trilochanapāla against Mahmud of Ghazni.¹³ A *rājaputra* is said to be one who has his pay and carries arms, and must therefore be loyal to his master.¹⁴ At two places the *rājaputras* are paired with horsemen;¹⁵ and when they deserted King Harsha in 1101, they are said to have disappeared with 'their horses'.¹⁶ They were thus, as in the *Chachnāma*, cavalrymen.

The *rājaputras* began to form a loose federation of castes well before the twelfth century in a manner characteristic of the Indian social system. Kalhana regards them as immigrants into Kashmir,¹⁷ one of them coming from as far as Champa (eastern Bihar).¹⁸ And yet they had begun to claim a very high position on account of their birth. Kalhana refers to 'those *Rājaputras*, Anantapāla and the rest, who claim descent from the thirty-six families, and who in their pride would not concede a higher position to the sun himself'.¹⁹

One can conjecture that a number of the class of elite cavalry troopers began to coalesce into a larger caste, partly through the contracting of inter-clan marriages, for which evidence has been collected by B.D. Chattopadhyaya.²⁰

The coalescence of the rājaputras into a warrior caste in northern India and the Deccan was accompanied by their acquiring a key position in the structure of power. The *Lekhāpaddhati*, a remarkable collection of documents from Gujarat representing the conditions from the ninth to the thirteenth century, shows that a rājaputra could apply to a rāṇaka (a sub-ruler) for the grant of a village in lieu of the revenues whereof he had to furnish 20 horsemen and 100 foot-soldiers for the rāṇaka's service.²¹ The numbers of retainers, horse and foot, are obviously exaggerated, but what is important is the indication of the way in which the rājaputras were now clearly intruding into agrarian relationships by taking over villages against the obligation of performing military services.

The Prakrit form of rājaputra was rāut; and it is in this form that we have them increasingly designated in inscriptions and Persian texts—the latter, indeed, not using the Hindi form 'Rajput' at all before the sixteenth century. The Jaunpur brick inscription of 1217 shows a rāut borrowing money against his 'cultivated land', while the Mahoba Fort plate (originally from Kasrak, Shahjahanpur district of Uttar Pradesh) of 1227 shows a rāut lending money against pledges of land. In the former inscription a rāṇaka, obviously of superior status to the rāut, stands security for the rāut.²²

Our evidence then establishes that the rājaputra, first appearing as a cavalryman of some status, in time came to hold dominant rights over particular areas of land. The rāṇaka and ṭhakkura, whose designations appear in Sanskrit inscriptions only in the ninth century (though these are present in the form of *rāna* and *thakur* in the *Chachnāma*, the translation of an eighth-century text),²³ were obviously higher in rank than the rājaputras. But with the emergence of the Rajputs as a caste (which to judge from Kalhana's reference to the rājaputras' descent from thirty-six families must have reached a fairly advanced stage of formation by the eleventh century), the rulers, rāṇakas, and ṭhakkuras could also belong to the same caste as the cavalry soldier.²⁴ The solidarity of caste could also help ensure loyalty to the rulers and chiefs from their armed retainers, who would see themselves as caste peers or clansmen. So situated, the rājaputra, warrior and landholder, could be aptly described as the 'knight' of Indian feudalism.²⁵

The next stage in the evolution of this caste of rulers and 'knights' into zamīndārs began with the establishment of the sultanates. How this transformation occurred is best illustrated by what happened in the upper Gangetic basin—for which we are better informed than other regions. The two Rajput kingdoms of the Chahāmanas and the Gahadavālas were destroyed during the last decade of the twelfth century. But, as inscriptions show, even if the dynastic rulers disappeared, the rāṇakas and rāuts still remained in place.²⁶ Writing in 1259, Minhaj Siraj, refers to both rānas and rāuts.²⁷ Ziyā Baranī too in his account of the rulers before 'Alāuddin Khaljī (1296–1316) has references to rānas and rāuts as chiefs and military captains respectively.²⁸ But thereafter these terms cease to occur, and instead the rural potentates are designated chaudharīs and *khots* or headmen (*muqaddams*).

The change is more than merely one of terminology; it seems to reflect a new relationship. This we can, perhaps, imagine to have come about as follows. The rāṇakas and rāuts when subjugated remained fairly autonomous, being obliged mainly to pay tribute. Whenever they could, they disowned the obligation, thereby turning their territory into mawas or rebel country.²⁹ Such a situation changed when the sultan's administration began to aim at a larger tax collection, and the tributary chiefs came to be pressed into the position of intermediaries, responsible for tax collection. The rural magnate, who replaces the rāṇaka

or *rāna* in our texts to suit an alteration in functions, is then the *chaudharī*. Visiting Delhi in the 1330s, Ibn Battūta speaks of groups of '100 villages' forming a *ṣadī* ('hundred') with a Hindu (*kāfir*) headman over them called *jautarī* (Arabic transcription of *chaudhari*), who had, significantly enough, a separate revenue collector (*mutasarrāf*) appointed along of him.³⁰ As for the *rāut* we find him replaced by the *khōṭ* (an Arabic-seeming word of obviously Indian origin), the village headman. Of the *khōṭ*s it was said that they were Hindus who 'ride good horses, wear fine clothes, shoot arrows from Persian bows, fight with each other and go out for hunt' and, in good measure, chew betel leaves.³¹ We have surely the image of a *rāut* or *rājaputra* here, so that the *khōṭ* can be seen as either in fact or by aspiration to be his successor.

As 'Alāuddīn Khaljī's land revenue measures show, a major purpose of his policy was to divest both the *chaudharī* and *khōṭ* of any independent armed power and to convert them into mere cogs of the machinery of revenue collection. The harshness of 'Alāuddīn Khaljī's measures could not be fully sustained under his successors. Ghiyāṣuddīn Tughluq (1320–25) exempted them from paying revenue on their own lands.³² When Muhammad Tughluq (1325–51) increased the tax burden placed upon them, they revolted in the Doab in a rebellion that could be suppressed only by the most ferocious means.³³ The pendulum swung the other way when, in the early years of Fīroz Tughluq's reign (1351–87), 'the *khōṭ*s and headmen (*muqaddams*)' became possessed of large numbers of horses and cattle, as Baranī, now a prisoner at the fort of Bhatnair, could himself observe.³⁴

Thus, if the *rāṇakas* and *rāuts*, mostly belonging to the Rajput caste, reappear as *chaudharīs* and *khōṭ*s, this reappearance could yet also represent a basic transformation in their position and functions, a change from a military aristocracy into a landed gentry. The transformation was also accompanied by a dilution in the Rajput preponderance of the class. The *chaudharīs* and *khōṭ*s in Baranī's time (c. 1358) were all Hindus; and Ibn Battuta, his contemporary, explicitly corroborates this with regard to *chaudharīs*, as we have seen. But when Fīroz Shah in his proclamation of 1353 clubs *muqaddams* (headmen = *khōṭ*s) with *mafrozīs* (persons appointed by the state to control land) and *māliks* (holders of revenue-free grants) under the collective designation of *zamīndārs*, he was really putting into one class, the *muqaddams*, who, as we have seen, were largely, if not entirely Hindus, with *mafrozīs* and *māliks*, who were largely Muslims.³⁵ One may think of *mafrozīs* as the state's nominees in place of the *rānas* or *chaudharīs* and of *māliks* as those who, holding tax-free lands (like the *khōṭ*s), could join the ranks of the local dominant elements.

Besides the intervention of the state there was another source of change in the composition of this class of proto-*zamīndārs*. This factor was money, by which superior rights could be acquired through acts of purchase. In the earlier part and middle of the sixteenth century the purchases of rights over land, described as *milk-i-khōṭī* or *milk-o-khōṭī*, are recorded in various documents in the localities of Bilgram and Shamsabad on opposite sides of the Ganga near Kanauj.³⁶ Muslims often appear both as sellers and purchasers.³⁷ In subsequent documents from these localities the term *khōṭī* disappears to be replaced by *milkiyat* and, in the seventeenth century, *zamīndārī*. In one document from Shamsabad, of 1611, it is alleged by the Muslim *zamīndārs* of a village that they had purchased their right from certain *māliks* ('proprietors'), who in turn had purchased it from the *Kāchhis* and *Chamārs* (two low castes) of the village.³⁸ This suggests that not only did outsiders enter the scene by buying out members of the old dominant castes (mostly Rajputs), but also created a superior right, where possibly none existed before, by buying out ordinary peasants and villagers. In either case the older elements in the *zamīndār* class would have their dominance modified as the market in land (or rather in *zamīndārī* rights) continuously

brought in outsiders, including Muslims. A similar process can be discerned in villages in and around Brindavan where the Gosains purchased lands from groups of headmen (*panch-muqaddams*) and ordinary villagers in the latter half of the sixteenth century.³⁹ Like many earlier Muslim purchasers, these Gosains, all from Bengal, were manifestly outsiders. Therefore, once the zamīndārī rights came to be saleable, the earlier caste monopolies over the land could be eroded, though by no means eliminated.

Caste or clan possession of zamīndārī was also affected by forcible means. Since the zamīndārs had to collect revenue on behalf of the state and levy their own perquisites (*huqūq*), it was necessary for them to have armed retainers at their command. The great official survey, given in tabular form in Abul Fazl's *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, recognizes this when for each pargana it gives not only the names of the zamīndār castes, but also the number of horses and foot-soldiers they maintained. The total for the zamīndārs' military strength in the empire comes to 384,558 cavalry; 4,277,057 infantry; 1,863 elephants; 4,260 cannon pieces; and 4,500 boats.⁴⁰ Obviously, such armed strength could be used not only against the peasants, but also against other zamīndārs, as well as the state. It was undoubtedly a tool often used for extending zamīndārī possession.

This is exceptionally clear in the case of the Marathas. The two rights that the Maratha rulers and chiefs sought everywhere, that is, *waṭan* and *chauth*, can now be shown to be of purely zamīndār origin. *Waṭan* is a seventeenth-century Arabicization of *vartana*, used in Maharashtra for tax-free lands of superior rural strata as well as village officials and servants (*balūtas*). *Vartana* in turn makes us recall *vanṭh* (Hindi *bānt*) in Gujarat, the land left to the zamīndār tax free, when the authorities collected tax from the land directly. In lieu of the land so left to him, the zamīndār in Gujarat and north Konkan was entitled to a fourth of the total revenue. This last, then, is clearly the initial point for Shivājī's claim to *chauth*.⁴¹

Given the zamīndārī aspirations of the Maratha chiefs, it is not surprising that as the Maratha state grew, it became an instrument for the supplanting of old zamīndārs by the Marathas in whatever territory came under its control. In 1762–63 Āzād Bilgrāmī noted:

The Marathas in general, but the Deccani Brahmans in particular, have the desire to deprive all people of their means of livelihood and appropriate it for themselves. They do not spare the zamīndārī of *rājās*, nor even the zamīndārī of small people like headmen and village accountants. Uprooting most cruelly the heirs of ancient lineages, they establish their own possession and desire that the Konkani Brahmans should become the proprietors (*mālīk*) of the whole world.⁴²

In the north a similar effect followed the success of the Jat rebellion in the Braj zone around Mathura on both sides of the Yamuna. In the 1750s Shah Waliullāh remarked that 'the lands that the Jats have brought into their possession are not their own, but have been usurped from others. The [original] proprietors (*mālīkān*) of those villages are still to be found'.⁴³

In such accession to zamīndārī status there usually followed a process of 'Rajputization' (to follow B.D. Chattopadhyaya's terminology), on the lines of M.N. Srinivas's 'Sanskritization'. There was, in case of both the Marathas and Jats, a tendency to claim Rajput origins: Shivājī's claims to a descent from the line of the Ranas of Mewar is well known.⁴⁴ As for the Jats, it was noted in 1825 that while the ordinary Jats followed the practice of widow remarriage (*karāo*), and their women went about unveiled, 'those [Jats] who have reached the status of estate-owners (*riyāsat*) and chiefship, do not practise widow remarriage, wear good and fine clothes, and keep their women in purdah. The way they pray, eat or wear is that of the gentry from amongst the Brahmans and the Vaishyas, not like that of peasants'.⁴⁵ Had, perhaps, modern conditions not intervened, a number of Jat zamīndārs would have entered the Rajput caste.

We thus see here a process by which changes in the caste composition of the zamīndār class would initiate an upward movement of new elements in the caste hierarchy, the ultimate object being an incorporation into the previously dominant caste. For Muslim entrants into the zamīndār class this was not possible; but several Muslim zamīndārs still claimed Rajput origins: the Ranghar, the Qayām-khānīs, and the Mewātīs, to cite a few examples.

In the court literature of the Mughal empire, the term zamīndār or its equivalents būmī, or rāīs, in the eighteenth century, ta'alluqdār, carried almost a prejorative nuance. The zamīndārs were not loyal: 'they look to every side, and whoever appears more powerful and tumult-raising, they join him'.⁴⁶ It was, says Abul Fazl elsewhere, 'out of wisdom and good fortune' that Rāja Bhāramal of Amber left 'the ranks of the zamīndārs' (as if this was not a position that could command approbation) and became 'one of the select of the Court'.⁴⁷ Aurangzeb's official historian employs the word *zamīndārāna* in the sense of disloyal or treacherous conduct.⁴⁸

The attitude reflects the suspicions of the Mughal ruling class towards chiefs and lesser zamīndārs who, because of their armed power, always pose a challenge to it. There was also here, possibly, a cultural divide as well: a contempt of the urban-based elite for the rural magnates. The lexicographer Ānand Rām 'Mukhlis' bemoaned the fact that in 1743 the emperor Muhammad Shah should have personally taken the field against 'Alī Muḥammad Khān, the Rohila chief, 'a mere *ta'alluqdār* of some villages'.⁴⁹ But perhaps the distance from the world of zamīndārs is most obvious in Saiyid Ghulām 'Ālī Naqavī's observation about Sūraj Mal, the Jat ruler (1756–63). 'Although he spoke the Braj dialect and wore the dress of a zamīndār,' we are told, 'he still possessed such intelligence as made him a sage among his people'.⁵⁰

It is for students of cultural history to determine whether we can set this divide in terms of the 'high culture' of the Mughal ruling class and its dependants, and the 'middle culture' of the zamīndārs, the latter bearing a much stronger imprint of regional and local influences. It is also possible that when the zamīndārs' power revived in the eighteenth century, simultaneously with the decline of the Mughal empire, there took place a corresponding shift in character of art and literature. There was a 'provincialization' of art styles, in painting as well as architecture, and the rise of Urdu and literary Hindi, at the expense of Persian, in northern India. Whether this could be related to the character and social base of the class, which now controlled much of the available patronage, is a question that requires careful scrutiny.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- 2 'Ainul Mulk 'Māhrū', *Inshā-i Māhrū* (edited by Abdur Rashid and M. Bashir Husain) (Lahore: 1965), p. 17. Cf. Irfan Habib, *Cambridge Economic History of India* (edited by T. Raychaudhuri and I. Habib) (Cambridge: 1982), vol. I, pp. 58–9.
- 3 The evidence on which these remarks are made is set out in I. Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India* (New Delhi: 1999 [revised edition]), pp. 169–86.
- 4 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 222.
- 5 H.M. Elliot, *Memoirs on the History, Folklore and Distribution of the Races of the North-Western Provinces of India* (revised by John Beames) (London: 1869), vol. II, pp. 202, 203.

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- 7 Takao Hayashi, 'The Bakhshali Manuscript', PhD. thesis, Brown University, 1985, University Microfilms International, p. 530.
- 8 *Chachnāma* (edited by Umar B. Muhammad Daudpota) (Delhi: 1939), pp. 169–70.
- 9 Ibid., pp. 47, 215: this being a rule from the pre-Arab kingdom confirmed by the Arab conquerors.
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- 11 Cf. Aparna Chattopadhyay, 'Reflections of Ancient Indian Society in the *Kathāsaritsāgara*', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, series 4, 1966, p. 111. See A. Berriedale Keith, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (London: 1920/1956), pp. 281, 286–7.
- 12 *Rajatarangini* (translated by M.A. Stein) (London: 1900), vol. I, pp. 160–63. In relating an incident of the late eleventh century, there may be a play on the double meaning of rājaputra, a prince and mercenary soldier: *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 288.
- 13 Ibid., pp. 270–71.
- 14 Ibid., p. 295 (verse 325).
- 15 Ibid., p. 296 (verse 360), 385 (verses 1512–14).
- 16 Ibid., p. 393 (verses 1617–18).
- 17 Ibid., II, p. 86 (verse 1082).
- 18 Ibid., II, p. 87 (verse 323).
- 19 Ibid., I, p. 393 (verses 1617–18).
- 20 'Origin of the Rajputs', *Indian Historical Review*, vol. III, part 1, 1976, pp. 59–82. Chattopadhyaya speaks of 'Rajputization' as 'a process of social mobility' (p. 81).
- 21 Cf. Ram Sharan Sharma, *Indian Feudalism, c. AD 300–1200* (Delhi: 1980/1985 [2nd edition]) pp. 162–3.
- 22 For the texts, translation, and analysis of the two inscriptions, Pushpa Prasad, *Sanskrit Inscriptions of Delhi Sultanate, 1191–1526* (Delhi: 1990), pp. 78–89.
- 23 Cf. I. Habib, 'Linguistic Materials from Eighteenth-Century Sind: An Exploration of the *Chachnama*', *Indian History Congress Symposia Papers—11* (1994–95), (Delhi: 1995), pp. 12–14.
- 24 It must be remembered that the *thakkuras*, like the rājaputras, could have belonged to different castes. As late as the Besahi grant of the Gahadavāla ruler Govindacandra of AD 1116 we have 'a Brahman *Thakkura*, Devapala Sarman', as the grantee. H.C. Ray, *The Dynastic History of Northern India* (Delhi: 1973 [2nd edition]), I, p. 517.
- 25 Cf. Rushton Coulborn, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. X, part 3, p. 369 n.
- 26 The Jaunpur brick inscription of 1217 and the Mahoba Fort/Kasrak inscription of 1227, already cited. Prasad, *Sanskrit Inscriptions of Delhi Sultanate*, pp. 78–9.
- 27 *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī* (edited by Abdul Haiy Habibi) (Kabul: 1963 and 1963–64), vol. I, pp. 399, 481, 485; vol. II, pp. 18, 57.
- 28 *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī* (edited by Saiyid Ahmad Khan, W.N. Lees, and Kabir al-Din) (Calcutta: 1862), pp. 52, 182.
- 29 For the term *mawās*, I. Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, p. 379 and n. The word occurs frequently in the *Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī*, vol. I, p. 491; vol. II, pp. 11, 18, 19, 27, 29, and subsequent texts as well.
- 30 Ibn Battūta, *Rihla* (Beirut: 1964), p. 507; H.A.R. Gibb (tr.), *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, AD 1325–1354*, (New Delhi: 1993 [reprint]), vol. III, p. 741.
- 31 The quoted words are put in Sultan 'Alāuddīn *Khaljī*'s mouth by Ziya Baranī: *Tārīkh-i Fīroz Shāhī*, p. 291; also pp. 287–8.
- 32 Ibid., p. 430.
- 33 Ibid., pp. 472–3, 479–80.
- 34 Ibid., p. 554.
- 35 Fīroz Shāh's proclamation already cited, *Inshā-i Māhrū*, p. 17. Cf. Baranī's grouping together of '*mutaṣarrifs, māliks, mafroziṣ, rānas, chaudhuris and muqaddams*' (p. 106). For the meaning of *mafrozi*, Habib, *Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. I, p. 58 and n; for *milk* (revenue grant), whence *mālik*, its holder, *ibid.*, pp. 75–6.
- 36 Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, p. 165n.
- 37 This may be seen from the calendar of many of these documents, I. Habib, 'Aspects of Agrarian Relations and Economy in a Region of Uttar Pradesh during the 16th Century', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. IV, part 3, 1967, pp. 205–32.

- 38 Ibid., pp. 215–16, 230–32.
- 39 For these transactions, Tarapada Mukherjee and Irfan Habib, 'Land Rights in the Reign of Akbar: The Evidence of Sale-deeds of Vrindaban and Aritha', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, L Session, Gorakhpur, 1989–90, pp. 236–55.
- 40 For these figures, Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, p. 203.
- 41 Ibid., pp. 184–6.
- 42 Āzād Bilgrāmī, *Khizāna-i 'Āmira* (Kanpur: 1871), p. 47.
- 43 Shāh Walīullāh, *Siyāsī Maktūbāt* (edited by K.A. Nizami) (Aligarh: 1950), pp. 50–51.
- 44 Jadunath Sarkar, *Shivaji and His Times* (Calcutta: 1952 [5th edition]), p.203.
- 45 James Skinner, *Tashrīh ul-Aqwām*, British Museum MS Add. 27, 255, pp. 155b–7a. The quoted passage is on pp. 156b–7a.
- 46 Abul Fazl, *Akbarnāma* (edited by Agha Ahmad Ali and Abdur Rahim) (Calcutta: 1873–87), vol. II, p. 63.
- 47 Ibid., p. 156.
- 48 Muḥammad Kāẓim, *'Ālamgīrnāma* (edited by Khadim Husain and Abdul Hai) (Calcutta: 1865–73), p. 571.
- 49 *Safarnāma-i 'Mukhlis'* (edited by Syed Azhar Ali) (Rampur: 1946), pp. 69–70.
- 50 *'Imād us-Sa'ādat* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishor, 1897), p. 55. Ghulam 'Alī completed this work in 1808, but he must be drawing on an earlier source.

CHAPTER 12

Peasants

Irfan Habib

Owing to the vagueness that often surrounds words like peasants, farmers, and cultivators, it is perhaps desirable to explain in what sense we are going to employ the word 'peasant' in this chapter. A peasant is a person who organizes the cultivation of land, while he himself (with his family) contributes the whole or part of the labour needed for it. He is thus distinct from the agricultural labourer, who makes no decision on the use of the land he works on, whether he works regularly as farm servant, or is only occasionally employed for a specific task. On the other hand, the landowner who works his fields through labourers and farm servants without himself contributing any amount of labour is not, by our definition, a peasant. Such a non-labouring landowner may, however, also rent out the land to peasants who, while cultivating it, may either pay a fixed rent or surrender a portion of the crop to him. Peasants themselves can be divisible into various categories. They may employ wage labourers to supplement their own labour or they may work as labourers for part of the time on others' fields to supplement their earnings. They may own the land they cultivate, or be mere tenants or sharecroppers on it. They may own their own cattle and implements or be indebted to others for their use. Peasants can thus always be a highly differentiated class.

I

These definitions are necessary to set limits to our own discussion of the social history of the peasantry, which, since the coming of agriculture, has formed the larger part of the population of this country. Needless to say, it was on the surplus produced by the peasants that the ruling classes, their dependents, and the towns generally subsisted till the coming of the industrial age. The compulsions and customs by which the peasants were kept under subjection have greatly varied in nature. In India the caste system has undoubtedly played a role in making peasants accept the status and constraints imposed upon them. One can even see how their status in the caste hierarchy steadily depreciated over the first millennium AD.

At its beginning or a little before that millennium, the *Manusmṛiti* considers the pursuit of agriculture blameworthy because the 'wooden [plough] with iron point injures the earth and [the beings] living in the earth'.¹ Thus, by an appeal to the doctrine of *ahimsa*, so much promoted by Buddhism and Jainism, the plough became unclean, and the peasant who worked the plough earned opprobrium that has stuck till our own times.² R.S. Sharma shows how in the legal texts peasants came generally to be regarded not as Vaishyas as earlier, but as Shudras.³ This is confirmed in the seventh century by Xuan Zhuang (Hsuan Tsang) who found that in India peasants were held to be Shudras. Such varna ranking of most peasant castes (now usually given the designation of 'Other Backward Castes' in Indian officialese) is thus more than 1,300 years old, and was already in place by the early medieval times.⁴

If certain older peasant communities were thus reduced in status, it is also possible that other communities, previously held to be outside the pale of the varna system, were absorbed as Shudra castes once they took to agriculture. We have such an example in the Kaivartas. In the *Manusmṛiti* they are one of the polluted jātis, descended from an illegitimate union, and carrying on the contemptible profession of boatmen;⁵ they were thus 'outcastes', not Shudras. In the eleventh century they appear in north Bengal, as naked soldiers riding buffaloes, under their chief Bhima, who had slain a Pala ruler, Mahipāla II.⁶ The fact that the Kaivartas are said to have been 'disaffected on account of taxation [during the previous Pala rule]', suggests that they were in fact peasant soldiers.⁷ They were suppressed by the Pala ruler Rāmapāla, but a later Sena ruler Ballālasena (c.1159–85) is said to have made 'a clean caste of the lowly Kaivartas', a significant acknowledgement of admitting them to the caste order.⁸

The Jatts or Jats seem to have a similar history. In Sind in the seventh century, Xuan Zhuang found settled along the Indus river a large population, formally Buddhist, of 'unfeeling temper', who lived by rearing cattle, and had among them 'neither rich nor poor'.⁹ He does not name them, but the description accords in almost every detail with that of the people described as Jats by the *Chachnama*, while narrating the events of the reign of the Brahman ruler Chach (late seventh century) and the subsequent Arab conquest of Sind, 710–14. The Jats, 'a people of the wastes' (*dashtī*), were settled on both sides of the Indus; they were of 'fierce temper'; they had no 'big or small' among them. They could not wear soft clothes, and had to go bareheaded and barefooted; they were obliged to keep a dog by their side when they went out; they were not allowed to ride a horse, and, if they did, it had to be saddle-less and rein-less. The Arab conquerors confirmed all the past constraints upon them.¹⁰ The descriptions of both Xuan Zhuang and the *Chachnāma* leave us in little doubt that the Jats in Sind were a pastoral people, and were treated as an outcaste jāti, practically at level with the Chandalas.

But when our eleventh-century sources describe the Jats, their status is substantially altered. They now appear in the vicinity of Multan as masters of a large number of boats on the Indus, and strong enough both to resist and to assist Ghaznavid power.¹¹ They are no longer untouchables: rather, Alberuni, whose direct experiences in India were confined to the Punjab, describes them as 'cattle-owners, low Shudra people'.¹² The pastoral element was then obviously still prominent among the Jats, but we may suppose that they were also now taking to settled cultivation to merit recognition as Shudrās. By the seventeenth century Jat had come to mean 'a villager, a rustic', in the local language of the Punjab, and the Jats were now considered the 'lowest caste of the Vaishyas'.¹³ Indeed, late in the nineteenth century, the word *jat* in western Punjab meant an agriculturist *par excellence*.¹⁴ In due course, then, there came about the transformation of the Jats into a community of peasants with the achievement of a corresponding rank in the caste hierarchy.¹⁵

Once forest folk and pastoral communities take to agriculture, economic differentiation is bound to arise, which in time tends to be institutionalized socially. A passage from the *Kamasutra* (fourth century AD) shows how the village headman (*gramadhipati*), local official (*ayukta*) and (rich) peasant (*halotthavrittikutrasya* [literally, son of one who derives his livelihood from the plough]) employed women to work in their fields and households. This was not simply because the upper peasants had the resources to give employment, but also because they could extract *viṣṭi-karma* (forced labour) from women of the poorer classes.¹⁶ The *Milindapanho* (datable from the first century to fifth century AD) represents the monk Nāgasena telling king Milinda that when a village headman (*gāmasamiko*) lets it be known that he wishes to consult 'villagers' (*gāmika*), everyone knows that only 'the heads of houses' (*kutipurise*) assemble before him, and not '[ordinary] men and women, female and male slaves, hired workers (*bhataka*), servants (*kammakara*), [ordinary] villagers (*gāmika*), sick people, oxen, buffaloes, sheep, goats and dogs'.¹⁷

The appearance of a dominant class within the village indicated by these texts may aptly be cited as an illustration of the process that Kosambi had described as 'feudalism from below', although undoubtedly we would have to use the term 'feudalism' here in a much looser sense than terminological rigour might permit. But there could also be external claimants to rural dominance once a village hierarchy became possible. In the chapter on zamīndārs in this volume we consider the case of the rājaputras, who from the seventh century onwards, appear as cavalry soldiers and then warrior-magnates (*rāuts*, etc.) exercising power over villages, with apparent signs of distribution of large tracts among their clans. Such a process could accord with Kosambi's 'feudalism from above'.¹⁸ In time, as the rājaputra clans dispersed over the countryside, the rājaputras might turn into village headmen, while the latter in their turn might imitate the ways of the rājaputras: they too rode horses, wore fine clothes, and chewed betel leaf, to the indignation of Sultan 'Ālāuddīn Khaljī (1296–1316).¹⁹ We may imagine that not all those who called themselves rājaputras or Rajputs in the thirteenth century were necessarily the descendants of professional cavalry soldiers established in the locality by their right of conquest, but could well have been upper peasants who now turned into warriors, assuming the style of the rājaputras. Their clans could move into the Rajput caste just as that caste began to be formed out of the rājaputra clans. In the face of such complexities, the two processes of the emergence of that caste, 'from above' and 'from below', could now hardly be distinguished.

It might have been one result of social differentiation among the peasants that certain sections of them became subject to personal constraints. In a detailed study, G.K. Rai brings together much information on *viṣṭi* or forced labour taken from rural communities by potentates and grant holders in late ancient and early medieval India.²⁰ The references to *viṣṭi* are numerous in literature as well as inscriptions, but, while it was held to be oppressive and humiliating (so that those who rendered it were deemed to belong to castes of low status), its precise nature and magnitude are not easy to determine. Often, the labour was requisitioned for transport of baggage or grain, as is reported to have been the case in Kashmir in the twelfth century.²¹ And, it could be inferred from the reference to *viṣṭi-karma* in the passage in the *Kamasutra* already cited, that the term covered work done both within the house and the fields.²² Until more specific evidence comes to hand, *viṣṭi* does not seem to have been rendered on the same scale as labour services in west European feudal manors, since taxes always appear more prominently in the texts of grants than the rendering of *viṣṭi*.²³

Another feature of European feudalism was the forced association of the peasant with the estate: as a serf he could not desert the manor. Fa Xian (Fa-hsien), who journeyed to

India during AD 399–413, spoke of rulers in the Middle Kingdom, as well as elders and lay Buddhists, providing Buddhist monasteries with ‘houses, gardens and fields, as well as with husbandmen and cattle to cultivate their land’.²⁴ The inference that peasants were also gifted away along with cattle and land is here irresistible. A Chinese report of 732 about Kashmir makes a similar statement about the king, queen, princes, and chiefs having their ‘respective villages and folk’, which they could donate to both ‘monasteries and temples’. Sharma, who quotes this report, finds the earliest recorded grant in which the inhabitants were ‘unequivocally’ transferred to the grantee to be datable to the seventh century, the area being that of Kangra in Himachal Pradesh. He suspects such transfers about the same time in Gujarat as well.²⁵ He argues that by the beginning of the eleventh century such transfers were ‘a well-established practice’, the epigraphic evidence coming from Bengal, Orissa, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra.²⁶ There is, however, the possibility that in many cases the transfer of peasants along with the lands, meant no more than that the grantee received a particular area, where he became entitled to the taxes previously levied on peasants already cultivating the land and hitherto paying these taxes to the donor, with the simple natural assumption that the cultivators would not be allowed to abandon the granted land.

II

The substantive intrusion of Islam in Indian history began with the Arab conquest of Sind and southern Punjab (710–14). It may be useful, then, to begin by examining what position the peasants occupied in the legal structure of Islam and in the practice of the regimes of the Islamic east.

Islam is a monotheistic religion laying much emphasis on man’s direct obligation to God. In this relationship there is supposed to be equality among men, except, as the careful Alberuni added, ‘in piety’.²⁷ Such equality is, however, a matter of the spiritual sphere; in worldly matters, Islamic law heavily emphasizes contract among freeborn persons, and a strong concept of private property. But here, while a measure of equality is often assumed between two parties to a contract, or in punishments for crimes, status still counts. Islam permits slavery and the slaves’ entitlements are extremely limited; women too occupy an inferior place in terms of status and rights. Sa’dī, the great Persian poet and moralist of thirteenth-century Iran, saw birth as a decisive determinant of conduct;²⁸ and in the next century in India the historian Zīyā Baranī, well versed in Islamic theology, saw hierarchy as the legitimate and natural state of society, whether Islamic or non-Islamic.²⁹ It is, therefore, not surprising that amidst the denunciations of Hindus and Hinduism that flowed from the pens of Muslim critics in medieval times, the sins attacked are those of polytheism and image-worship: the caste system and the practice of untouchability are passed over in silence. The tolerant attitude towards these twin institutions is well typified by the action of the Arab commander in Sind, Muhammad ibn Qāsim, when he confirmed the repressive measures against the pastoral Jats in a manner reminiscent of the *Manusmṛiti*’s prescriptions against the Chāṇḍālas.³⁰

There is thus no reason to suppose that either the caliphs’ governors or the sultans had any urge to disturb or modify the caste system, and we may suppose that in the countryside, so long as the fiscal demands were met, the caste divisions and constraints remained in force without any interference. Indeed, since the caste system, by depressing the sustenance of landless labourers and low-caste peasants, served as a source of larger

surplus and, therefore, larger revenue, any disturbance of it could hardly be conducive to the rulers' interests.³¹

We need, however, to consider situations where the peasants had converted to Islam. It is likely that by the fourteenth century large numbers of peasants in Sind and southern Punjab had become Muslims.³² Eaton provides evidence of a Muslim peasantry in eastern Bengal by the testimony of a Jesuit traveller at the close of the sixteenth century; and Aurangzeb's official chronicler speaks of the peasantry being Muslim in what is now north Bangladesh by the 1660s.³³ Contrary to Eaton's supposition, however, it is likely that the process of Islamicization of east Bengal peasantry began much earlier than the time of the first firm testimony about it. Since Muslim law has no provisions for caste taboos, the tendency among Muslims was to weaken, in course of time, both endogamy and fixity of profession.³⁴ This could have gradually introduced greater mobility; it was thus noted in 1883 that in the Muslim areas 'on the lower Indus the menial who cultivates becomes a Jat by mere virtue of the fact, whereas in the rest of the Panjab he would have retained his menial caste unaltered'.³⁵ On the other hand, it is also true that castes corresponding to the landless menial castes also survive in areas of Muslim peasantry, like Hindkis in Pathan lands and Kamins in western Punjab.

There is practically no evidence that the sultans encouraged peasant conversions to Islam by any fiscal means. As in the fiscal practice of eastern Islamic lands,³⁶ there is no indication in the sources of the Delhi sultanate that the land tax (*kharāj*, *māl*) on Muslim peasants was at lower rates than for non-Muslim peasants. Until Firoz Tughluq's reign (1351–88), the *jizya* was also assimilated with the *kharāj*, so that the latter tax was also called *kharāj-[o] jizya*. It is only in Firoz Tughluq's time that *jizya* appears as an additional impost on non-Muslim peasants; but the practice disappears soon thereafter.³⁷ There seems, therefore, to have been no relaxation of tax on lands inhabited by Muslim peasantry. The status of the peasant as virtually equivalent to a non-Muslim is put concisely in the definition that a dictionary compiled in India in 1342–43 offers for *kafir*, or infidel: 'Peasant, or non-Muslim'.³⁸

The differentiated peasantry and social structure within the village accordingly continued without much change from the earlier times, and this naturally went on being reflected in caste divisions. When Baranī tells us that 'Alāuddīn Khaljī (1296–1316) ordered that all peasants were to pay half the produce in revenue, 'and in paying this no distinction is to be made between the *khoṭ* and Balahar',³⁹ he places the *khoṭ*, or the village headman,⁴⁰ at the top without specification of caste, but for the bottom of the peasant hierarchy he names a caste, that of Balāhars. From later information we know that Balāhars (identical with Thorīs and Dhānuks) were a menial caste, lower than Chamārs or tanners, assigned the work of agricultural labourer, porter, and guide.⁴¹ They obviously held small plots of land in recompense for their services; but now, like the *khoṭ*s with their large fields, they also became subject to tax.

The peasants' status as 'freeborn' (*hurr-aṣl*) had to be acknowledged since this was in accordance with Islamic law, under which there were normally few constraints, except those arising out of contract, upon freeborn persons (that is, such as were not slaves). But the very document in which the acknowledgement is made—a letter of a noble of Firoz Tughluq in respect of peasants of a village in the district of Thanesar (Haryana)—insists that the peasants had no right to leave their village, and begin cultivating land elsewhere because of their obligation to pay *jizya* and *kharāj* in their original village.⁴² One can see that in this particular respect there was little change from the practice of late ancient India, whatever the theoretical justifications.

One major event in the sultanate's political history was the peasant revolt in the Doab (western Uttar Pradesh) in 1332–34 during the reign of Muhammad Tughluq (1324–51). Baranī tells us that owing to the enhanced taxes imposed by the sultan, 'such peasants as were weak and without resources were made completely prostrate, and the rich persons who had resources and means turned rebels'. From his account it is clear that the village headmen (*khots* and *muqaddams*) were considered the leading spirits in the rebellion, though, owing to the sultan's repressive measures, 'most people ran away and fled into the jungles'.⁴³

As happens on many of these occasions, we do not have any version or description of events from the rebelling peasants themselves, and so lack any knowledge of how they organized themselves, or what role the caste played in their ranks. In view of this it becomes all the more valuable for us when a collection of inscriptions from Tamil Nadu in the first half of the fifteenth century lets us have for the first time the declarations of the resisting classes themselves. Y. Subbarayalu and N. Karashima have analysed inscriptions, dated to 1429, at Aduthurai and other places in a fairly large territory, extending from north Arcot to Thanjavur districts, which tell us of a decision made by Valangai ('Right-hand') and Idangai ('Left-hand') groups of castes of peasants and artisans to stand together in opposing certain fiscal innovations under the Vijayanagar regime. An inscription at Korukkai adds that the Valangai and Idangai groups of the locality were so heavily burdened with tax that they thought of running away, but, inspired by results at other places where they had forged unity, they now took a similar decision to resist. An Elavanasur inscription calls upon the local landowners (Bahmans and Vellalas) not to assist or yield to the intruders.⁴⁴ The unity arrived at between the Valangai and Idangai is, indeed, remarkable owing to the traditional antipathy between these two groups that together comprised a very large number of agricultural and non-agricultural castes. Clearly, fiscal pressures forced a junction, which led to a fairly successful movement against the Vijayanagar 'intruders' and the local landowners.

III

The Mughal empire, spanning the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the first half of the eighteenth, is rich in archival material and historical annals, as well as European records, but our knowledge about peasant society still remains rather limited. We tend to know far more about the fiscal burdens they bore than about the social life they led. Yet, compared to any earlier period, our information is certainly much greater, though it may come only from particular localities, and even there be tantalisingly fragmentary in character. The story can often be completed only by drawing upon information coming from the colonial period.

The caste system reflected, as in earlier periods, the differentiation among the peasantry that had both economic and cultural origins. A remarkable village-wise survey of Marwar, listing castes of peasants along with much other data has been preserved in Munhta Nainsī's *Mārwar rā Parganān nī Vigat*, compiled in 1664 or very shortly after.⁴⁵ Rajputs are listed here as peasants in numerous villages. In pargana Jodhpur they are the sole caste of peasants recorded in as many as 167 villages. It must be supposed that they carried on cultivation through some hired help, for traditionally the Rajputs could not touch the plough and their women could not work in the field.⁴⁶ It must be imagined that Rajput peasant villages contained a large population of 'menial' castes whose presence, however, Nainsi nowhere records among the villages.

The true peasant caste in much of Marwar was that of the Jats. Even in pargana Jodhpur they alone were the peasants in as many as 215 villages; and in the adjoining pargana of Merta they formed the sole caste of peasants in 242 villages (whereas the Rajputs were the only peasants in just six). A gulf separated the Rajputs from the Jats. The Jat worked the plough, Jat women worked in the fields; and the value of female labour was shown in the universality of widow remarriage (*karāu*) among the Jats.⁴⁷ An incident in 1679 in pargana Merta illustrates the gulf we have spoken of. Some Rajputs simply went to a Jat village, picked a Rajput who had settled there 'owing to distressed circumstances', and cut off his head to pass it off as that of the murderer of two official messengers, whom the Mughal officials were pressing them to produce: clearly, a Rajput who had settled among the Jats would lose all sympathy of his peers.⁴⁸

There were a number of other communities that had similar customs and practices to the Jats: their women too worked in the fields and widows were remarried. The *Tashrihu'l Aqwām* lists among such peasant castes the Ahirs, Ghosis, and Gujars, in an apparently descending order of status.⁴⁹ Gujars duly appear as peasants in the *Vigat*, but more common are the local Mers and Siwis.⁵⁰ Similar in their custom, but more ambitious in claiming a Rajput rank, were the Gauravas, who cultivated the land around Brindavan (near Mathura) and so have their history partially illumined by the rich documentation of the Gosvamis of Brindavan, in Persian and Braj, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁵¹

Another set of peasant castes was composed of Malis and Kachhis, known for their skill in intensive cultivation. The Malis appear among cultivating villagers in Nainsi's *Vigat*,⁵² and a document of 1611, from central Doab claimed that a village had belonged of old to Kachhis and Chamars, who had then sold away their rights, so that both castes, the latter being a menial one, must have been cultivating land there.⁵³

These various castes often individually formed the bulk of peasant populations of individual villages; but the *Vigat* shows that side by side with single-caste villages, these were also multi-caste villages, with two or more peasant castes. The same kind of complex pattern is attested for southern India as well.⁵⁴ It is possible that where these mixed villages contained a superior caste like the Rajputs, a kind of internal hierarchy based on caste distinctions within the village must have existed. But in cases where plebeian castes lived together, more egalitarian conditions might have prevailed, which may explain why Kachhis could have shared holdings in a village with the Chamars.

Another complexity to be taken into account is the factor of religious change. Muslim converts appear in our documents as individuals among peasant headmen controlling village land. A direct convert, 'Alī Khān, son of Angad, son of Rāgho Gaurava, is named as a guarantor in a sale of cultivated land made by two Hindu Gauravas to the priest of the Govind-dev temple, Brindavan, in 1654. Obviously, his conversion did not affect his relations with others of his caste on behalf of whom he undertook the guarantee.⁵⁵ Earlier, out of the thirteen village notables (panch) who in 1594, in hamlet Nagu (Brindavan), sold wasteland to Raja Man Singh, three bore Muslim names.⁵⁶ In 1641 the five headmen of Aritha (Radhakund) who issued a document in favour of the priest of Ramadhamodar temple was headed by Bārī, elsewhere named Bārī Khān.⁵⁷ These instances suggest that Muslims were not shunned by fellow peasants, nor were caste affinities forgotten. In 1825 Skinner (at Hansi, Haryana) noted that those Jats who became Muslims came to be called Shaikhs; yet at their marriages they paid the proper customary fees to the Brahmans.⁵⁸ Practices like this could contribute to social adjustment when other caste ties, such as intermarriage and inter-dining, were broken off. It is, therefore, likely that the slow penetration of Islam among the peasantry outside the Indus basin and east Bengal had probably

little effect on the rural caste structure, the separation of Muslim converts from their original castes being a long-drawn process and not an abrupt, sudden split.

What impulses drove peasants to Islam cannot be established from our documents. Except when Aurangzeb imposed the *jizya* in 1679, the Mughal administration made no particular distinctions between Hindu and Muslim peasants that could have attracted conversions on any scale.⁵⁹ Nor does Islamic religious literature address itself, except rarely (if at all), to the peasant. This is in contrast to what one so often finds in the monotheistic verses of Kabīr (fl.1500) and Gurū Nānak (d.1639) and his successors, especially Gurū Arjan (d.1606). There are numerous allegories in their verses based on the peasant's life; and it is clear that some times the headman, and even the ordinary peasant, was in their mind.⁶⁰ This may explain not only the popularity of Kabīr's verses in what is now the Hindi region, and of Gurū Nānak in the Punjab, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but also the cause whereby a number of peasants felt attracted towards the organized monotheistic panths that now arose.

The Satnāmīs of Narnaul in Haryana were an offshoot of the Kabīr panth. Their founder's (fl.1657) verses in his *pothi* have survived and are marked by rough, rustic egalitarianism. When the Satnāmīs rose against Mughal authority in 1672, they appeared to a hostile contemporary Hindi poet as an army (*dal*) of 'a crore of *ganwars*' (villagers).⁶¹ The peasant constituency is here unmistakable.

Within the Sikh panth the entry of the peasants takes practically the form of the entry of the Jats. Their massive presence in the following of the Gurus has been attributed to 'the egalitarian emphasis of the Gurūs' teachings'.⁶² An acute observer writing an account of the Sikhs at first-hand, c.1645, noted that Nānak's verses were 'in the language of the Jatts of the Panjab', and added: 'Jatt in the dialect of the Panjab means a villager, a rustic'. He found too that though all the Gurūs had been Khatri, 'most of the leading *masands* [authorized representatives] are Jatts'.⁶³

It is possible that many peasants, in responding favourably to the panths, were not uninfluenced by a desire to break out of the lower social status that was assigned to them by the traditional caste system. In other words, they were pursuing a radical alternative to Srinivas's 'sanskritization'. This rejection of the traditional constraints undoubtedly gave them a militancy, which in the case of both the Satnāmīs and the Sikhs so clearly fuelled their armed conflict with the Mughal government.

From the side of the Mughal government, the status assigned to the peasant was about the same as under the Delhi sultans. The state continued implicitly to claim that it was entitled to keep the peasants tied to the land they had earlier cultivated: this principle was invoked as justification for various expeditions designed to seize and bring back fugitive peasants.⁶⁴ Particularly relevant here is the evidence of seventeenth-century (pre-1650) documents from Gujarat, which show that peasants were required to return to their native domicile in case they migrated from one jurisdiction to another.⁶⁵ An illustrative case is recorded in a *parwana* or order of the years 1635–38. It recites that a peasant, (Ishaq) left his original village in pargana Chaurasi to go to Daman to cultivate land there. He then went to Bulsar to till land on a short lease. When the local *desāi* (pargana headman) sought to impose on him a permanent lease, he fled to a village in pargana Chakli, whence after two months he returned to his original village. But on the basis of his term of cultivation in pargana Bulsar, the *desāi* of that pargana was seeking to get Ishaq back. This claim was, however, overruled in favour of the claims of Ishaq's native village.⁶⁶

But if the imposed ties binding the peasant to his native locality might remotely remind us of the serf's bondage under feudalism, there was an opposite imposition too,

which may remotely anticipate modern landlordism. Writing in the earlier part of the eighteenth century, Qāzī Muḥammad A'lā tells us that the zamīndār's claimed the right to evict the peasants from the land, and the peasants themselves did not deny or contest the claim.⁶⁷ When in 1677 two headmen in a document from Awadh declare that they are the zamīndār's 'cultivators' (*muzārī'ān*) and 'till the land by his leave',⁶⁸ they offer the kind of acknowledgement Qāzī Muḥammad A'lā is speaking of. But so long as the land-man ratio was favourable, the zamīndār's claim to evict the peasant had little practical significance, and such is stated to have been the case as late as the early nineteenth century in what now is Uttar Pradesh.⁶⁹

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 *Manusmriti*, X, 84 (translated by G. Buhler as *The Laws of Manu*) (Oxford: 1886), pp. 420–21.
- 2 It is interesting that no such stigma apparently attaches to the tractor!
- 3 Ram Sharan Sharma, *Sudras in Ancient India*, (Delhi: 1958), pp. 232–3.
- 4 Samuel Beal (tr.), *Buddhist Records of the Western World* (London: 1884), vol. I, p. 82; Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels*, (London: 1905), vol. I, pp. 168–9.
- 5 *Manusmriti*, X, 34; Buhler, *Laws of Manu*, p. 410.
- 6 The references to Bhima's 'naked soldiers' who, 'riding buffaloes were hurling stupendous arrows', occur in Sandhyakar Nandi, *Rāmacarita* (edited by M. Haraprasad Sastri, translated and annotated by Radhagovinda Basak) (Calcutta: 1969), pp. 56–7 (verses II, 39, 42). This text is exceptionally difficult owing to its author attempting a double meaning throughout.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 56–7 (verse II, 40). Cf. R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism, AD 300–1200* (Delhi: 1980 [2nd edition]), p. 220, and R.D. Banerji, *The Palas of Bengal* (Varanasi: 1973 [reprint]), pp. 44–51.
- 8 H.C. Ray, *The Dynastic History of Northern India* (Calcutta: 1931), vol. I, p. 364.
- 9 Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, vol. II, pp. 273–4; Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels*, vol. II, pp. 252–3.
- 10 *Chachnāma* (edited by Umar bin Muhammad Daudpota) (Delhi: 1939), pp. 214–16, also pp. 47–8, 139. Balāzurī, *Futuh al-Baldan*, extracts translated in H.M. Elliot and John Dowson, *The History of India as told by its own Historians* (London: 1867), vol. I, p. 128, for the obligation imposed on the Jats to keep dogs with them—this under an Abbasid governor in the late eighth century.
- 11 'Abdul Haiy Gardezī, *Zainu'l Akhbār* (edited by Muhammad Nazim) (Berlin: 1928), pp. 87–9; Abul Fazl Baihaqī, *Tārīkh-i Baihaqī* (edited by Ghani and Faiyaz, Tehran) 1324/1945, pp. 533–4.
- 12 Edward C. Sachau (tr.), *Alberuni's India* (London: 1910), p. 401. Alberuni is referring here to Krishna's foster parents and was thus treating the Jats as corresponding to Yadavas.
- 13 *Dabistān-i Mazāhib*. (edited by Nazar Ashraf) (Calcutta: 1809), pp. 276, 286.
- 14 Denizel Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes* (Lahore: 1916 [reprint]), p. 105; Maya [Mayya] Singh, *The Panjabi Dictionary* (Lahore: 1895), p. 485.
- 15 For speculations on these lines, in respect of the Jats, Irfan Habib, 'Jatts of Punjab and Sind', in Harbans Singh and N. Gerald Barrier (eds), *Punjab Past and Present: Essays in Honour of Dr Ganda Singh* (Patiala: 1976), pp. 92–103.
- 16 *Kamasutra*, 5.5.5 and 6 (I owe the translation of this passage to Professor S.R. Sarma. For the date of the text, A.B. Keith, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* [Oxford: 1956 (reprint)], pp. 467–8.
- 17 *Milindapaṇḥo*, 1962, p. 147, T.W. Rhys Davids (tr.), *The Questions of Milinda* (Oxford: 1890), vol. I, pp. 208–9. I have made Rhys Davids' translation slightly more literal.
- 18 The basic definition for the two terms 'from above' and 'from below' occur in D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Bombay: 1956), p. 275. Kosambi is here thinking of the emergence of a class 'between the state and the peasantry', rather than of dominant elements *within* the peasantry, which might, as we here suppose, be the source of that class in the process of 'feudalism from below'.
- 19 Ziya Barani, *Tārīkh-i Firozshahi* (edited by Saiyid Ahmad Khan, W. Nassau Lees and Kabir al-Din) Bib. Ind. (Calcutta: 1862), pp. 287–8, 291.
- 20 G.K. Rai, 'Forced Labour in Ancient and Early Medieval India', in *Indian Historical Review*, vol. III, no. 1, 1976, pp. 16–42.

- 21 Kalhana, *Rajatarangini*, viii. 2513; M. Aurel Stein (tr.), *Kalhana's Rajatarangini* (London: 1900), vol. II, p. 197.
- 22 *Kamasutra*, 5.5.5 and 6.
- 23 Cf. D.D. Kosambi's denial that 'compulsory labour-service' for 'demesne-farming' in European feudalism had any parallel in India, *Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, p. 327.
- 24 Li Yung-hsi (tr.), *A Record of the Buddhist Countries by Fa-hsien* (Peking: 1957), p. 35. The sentence is similarly rendered in Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, vol. I, p. xxxviii.
- 25 Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*, pp. 45–8.
- 26 Ibid., pp. 187–90; B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century* (Allahabad: 1973), pp. 163–73; Lallanji Gopal, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. VI, no. 3, 1963, pp. 297.
- 27 Sachau, *Alberuni's India*, vol. I, p. 100.
- 28 Such are morals drawn from stories in Sa'dī's *Gulistān* and *Bostān*, various editions.
- 29 Cf. Irfan Habib, 'Ziyā Baranī's Vision of the State', *Medieval History Journal*, vol. 2 no. 1, 1999, pp. 29–32.
- 30 *Chachnama*. (edited by Daudpota), pp. 252–3.
- 31 Cf. Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perception* (New Delhi: 1995), p. 173.
- 32 The story is told by Nasīruddīn in his conversations, *Khairu'l Majalis*, recorded by Hamid Qalandar, c.1355 (edited by K.A. Nizami) (Aligarh: 1959), pp. 236–8, of a cowherd in a village near Ajodhan (Pakpattan) whose wife was taken away in a raid by the revenue collector: the presumption is throughout that the population of the village was Muslim.
- 33 Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760*, (Delhi: 1994), pp. 132–4.
- 34 On the weakening of endogamy among Muslim populations of the western Punjab plains, see Denzil Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes* (Lahore: 1916), pp. 10–11. (Ibbetson's work was originally published in 1881).
- 35 Ibid., p.30.
- 36 Cf. Reuben Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam* (Cambridge: 1957), pp. 310–11; Ann K.S. Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia* (London: 1953), p. 23.
- 37 For a discussion of agrarian taxation under the sultans where these points are made, Irfan Habib, *Cambridge Economic History of India* (edited by T. Raychaudhuri and I. Habib) (Cambridge: 1982), vol. I, pp. 60–68.
- 38 Hājib Khairat Dihlawī, *Dastūru'l Afāzil*. Nazir Ahmad, Tehran (ed.), n.d., p. 200.
- 39 Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshahi*, p. 287.
- 40 Baranī uses the term *khōṭ* together with *muqaddam*, village headman, and the term appears in sixteenth-century documents from the Doab in this sense and continued in use in Gujarat and the Deccan till modern times (Habib, *Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. I, p. 14). The first occurrence of *khōṭ* is in the early thirteenth-century work *Adabu'l Harb u'sh Shuja'at*, where 'the *khōṭ* of that village', near Ghazni, is mentioned, (edited by Ahmad Suhaili Khwansari) (Teheran: A.H. Shamsi 1346/1967), pp. 280–81. In Mahmūd Shādīābādī, *Miftāhu'l Fuṣalā*, completed in 1468–9 in Malwa, British Library MS, Or. 3299, p. 115a–b, *dih-giyā* (village headman) is defined as '*khōṭ* of village, *dihqan* [head of village, whence villager in later times], and whoever is below the station of a *rāi*'.
 41 Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India* (New Delhi: 1999 [2nd edition]), p. 181 and n.
- 42 *Inshā-i Māhrū* (edited by Abdur Rashid and Muhammad Bashir Husain) (Lahore: 1965) pp. 61–3. Any 'pretensions to possessing them [the peasants, as slaves] or their goods' are specifically disowned. Such a disclaimer, however, cannot conceal the fact that keeping peasants tied to their native village must render them semi-servile.
- 43 Baranī, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī*, pp. 472–3, 479–80.
- 44 Noburo Karashima, *Towards a new Formation: South Indian Society under Vijayanagar Rule* (Delhi: 1992), pp. 141–58, with map on p.140; Y. Subbarayalu, 'Peasantry of Tiruchirapalli District from 13th to 17th Centuries' in Noburo Karashima (ed.), *Socio-cultural Change in Villages in Tiruchirapalli District, Tamilnadu, India*, part I (Pre-modern Period) (Tokyo: 1983), pp. 123–31.
- 45 The work has been edited by Narain Singh Bhati, 2 vols, (Jodhpur: 1968, 1969).
- 46 The Rajput of Haryana, we are told, 'cultivates badly, for his women are more or less strictly secluded and never work in the fields, while he considers it degrading to actually follow the plough and will always employ hired ploughmen, if he can possibly afford it': Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes*, pp.134–5.
- 47 James Skinner's account of the Jats in his Persian work, prepared in 1825 in Haryana, the *Tashrīh ul-Aqwām*, Br. Library MS., Add. 27, 255, pp. 153b–7a. Those who rose in status to estate and chiefship (*riyāsāt o sardārī*), he says, gave up the practice and put women in seclusion—the standard form of 'sanskritization'.

- 48 Report in *Waqā'i-i Ajmer*, transcript in Department of History, Aligarh, nos. 15 and 16 (continuous pagination in the two vols.), p. 122.
- 49 *Tashrīḥ-ul Aqwām*, pp. 146b–50b.
- 50 Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*.
- 51 Ibid., p.150 and n. The Gauravas practised widow remarriage: *Gazetteer of the Delhi District, 1883–4* (Lahore: Punjab Government, 1884), p. 76.
- 52 Ibid., p. 145 and n.
- 53 Ibid., p. 145.
- 54 David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India* (New Delhi: 1989 [reprint]), pp. 66–7.
- 55 Brindavan documents (photographs), Govind-dev collection, document dated 4 Rajab 1064/21 May 1654.
- 56 Govind-dev collection, document dated 29 Rabi' II 1002/22 January 1594.
- 57 Brindavan documents: Radhadamodar collection, 9, dated 21 Safar 1051/1 June 1641.
- 58 *Tashrīḥ-ul Aqwām*, p. 156b.
- 59 On jizya see, Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, pp. 285–7.
- 60 For an analysis of a selection of this material see Irfan Habib, 'Evidence for Sixteenth-century Agrarian Conditions in the *Guru Granth Sāhib*', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress (Poona session, 1963)*, Calcutta, 1964, pp. 186–94. The *Granth Sāhib*, it may be remembered, contains a very early collection of Kabīr's verses, besides those of the Gurus and other monotheistic teachers, that were finally brought together by Gurū Arjan.
- 61 Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, pp.395–7, for a more detailed discussion with fuller references.
- 62 W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community: Five Essays* (Delhi:1975), pp. 11–12.
- 63 *Dabistan-i Mazahib* (edited by Nazar Ashraf, Calcutta: 1809), pp. 286–8; portion translated in J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib (eds), *Sikh History from Persian Sources: Translations of Major Texts* (New Delhi: 2001), pp. 63, 66.
- 64 Cf. Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, pp. 130–31.
- 65 Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS, Blochet Supl. Pers. 482, pp. 40b–42a, 50a–b, 94b, 98b–99b, 152a–b, 154a, 163b–164a, 166a–b.
- 66 Ibid., p. 160a–b.
- 67 *Risāla Ahkām al-Ārāzī*, MS, Aligarh, Abdus Salam Coll, Arabiya (4) 331, p. 44a.
- 68 Quoted, Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, p. 178.
- 69 Colebrooke's summing up (1819) of evidence gathered from 1815 enquiries and Holt Mackenzie's memorandum of July 1819, paragraphs 431–41: *Selection from the Revenue Records of the North-west Provinces, 1818–20, Pending the Enactment of the Regulations VIII, 1822* (Calcutta: 1866), pp. 95–7, 253.

CHAPTER 13

Labourers and Artisans

Irfan Habib

I

How labourers and artisans came to be organized in various jātis (castes), and these in turn ranked in relation to each other, is a matter on which there can be little unanimity of opinion. The *Manusmṛiti*, dated to about the beginning of the first millennium AD, describes an undoubtedly early stage where the jātis lay outside the four varnas, and thus existed only among populations of low and menial status.

In book X Manu describes how the jātis arose out of illegitimate unions of females of higher with males of lower varnas, and of various further illegitimate unions among their descendants. This became later a widespread, conventional device to fix different lowly rankings by the imagined illegitimacy of the birth of the ancestors of each jāti. The more historically significant information perhaps relates to the occupations assigned to the jātis. A rough classification of the jāti-occupations furnished by Manu is offered below:¹

A. HUNTING, FISHING; LEATHER-WORKING

Sairandhra	Ensnaring animals (X. 32)
Nishadas, Meda, Andhra, }	Fishing (X. 48)
Chunchus, Madgus }	Killing wild animals (X.48)
Kshattris, Ugras, }	Killing animals that live in
Pukkakas }	holes (X.49)
Kārāvara	Leather-work (X.36)
Dhigvanas	Leather-work (X.49)
Venas	Drum-playing (X.49)

B. CANE, WOOD, HERBS FROM FORESTS

Pāṇḍusopāka	Dealing in cane (X.37)
Āyogava	Carpentry (X.48)
Mārgava, Kaivarta	Boatmen (X.34)
Sūtas	Looking after horses and chariots (X.47)
Ambashṭhas	Healing [with herbs] (X.47)

C. DISPOSAL OF THE DEAD

Antyāvasāyin	Employed in burial grounds (X.39)
Chandālas, Svapachas	Carrying away corpses of persons without relatives (X.55)
	Executing criminals (X.56)

D. SEMI-SERVILE SERVICES

Sairandhra	Serving in manner of slaves (X.32)
Maitreyaka	Ringling bells, praising great men (X. 33)
Vaidehakas	Service of women (X.47)

E. NOMADIC OCCUPATIONS

Andhra, Meda	Living outside villages (X.36)
Chandālas, Svapachas	{ Wandering from place to place (X.52);
	{ Live outside villages (X.51)
Māgadhas	Trade (X.47)

The occupations, one can see, are based primarily or secondarily on gathering or foraging activities (A and B); then on semi-servile services (C and D); and, finally, on nomadic activities (E). What are entirely excluded from their range are agriculture and pastoralism, despite the fact that the *Manusmṛiti* (X.84) considers ploughing to be a sinful practice.² Crafts based on materials obtained from agriculture are also excluded, such as cotton-spinning, weaving, dyeing, and oil-manufacture, and so are some other crafts, for example, of potters and metal smiths. In other words, developed urban crafts do not belong to the sphere of the condemned jātis; and this may incidentally be seen as a strong argument against Furer-Haimendorf's thesis of urban origins of untouchability.³ To judge by the *Manusmṛiti* list, the origins of the institution lay more in the borderland between sedentary villages and forests: gathering and foraging populations, one may imagine, were increasingly brought under subjection as the cultivated expanse increased and the forest retreated, and as these communities were subjugated they were kept outside the varna order as outcaste jātis.⁴

If this was the condition at the beginning of the first millennium, we have in Alberuni's *Kitab al-Hind* (c.1035) a description of the conditions at the end of that millennium. He classifies the castes placed outside the four varnas into two groups, the *antyaja* and the outcastes. The *antyaja* comprised, he says, eight 'guilds', namely, 'the fuller, shoe-maker, juggler, the basket- and shield-maker, the sailor, fisherman, the hunter of wild animals and of birds, and the weaver'. They could not live together with the four varnas and so lived 'near the villages and towns of the four castes but outside them'. The outcastes were called Hadi, Doma, Chandāla and Badhatau: they were 'occupied with dirty work like the cleansing of the villages and other services'. Like the *Manusmṛiti* and other traditional texts, Alberuni too attributes the present position of these castes to their descent out of supposed illegitimate unions.⁵

Alberuni is here stating the position of the *dharma'sāstras*, some of which speak of seven *antyajas*. It may be observed that, except for weavers, Alberuni lists under *antyaja* castes not artisans, but holders of occupations that were connected with gathering and hunting activities, or were directly based on them (for example, leather-work), or involved nomadism of one sort or another. The outcastes are obviously made up of communities that were assigned scavenging duties. Artisans other than weavers are not on Alberuni's list, so that it cannot be said on the basis of his account that artisans in general were forced to live outside the towns and villages. B.N.S. Yadava, however, cites another legal text, that of Hemādri (thirteenth century), in which the *antyaja* comprise practically all the main

artisanal castes: carpenter, goldsmith, tailor, oilman, *sūta* (of miscellaneous occupations), potter, wine-seller, barber, and ironsmith.⁶ There is clearly a fundamental difference in the two concepts of the antyaja communities; and one can only infer that while according to the Brahmanical texts read by Alberuni, most artisans were Shudras, other legal authorities could now put them as antyajās in a still lower position. It is also to be borne in mind that the artisan castes themselves might have laid claims to a higher status than allotted to them by the jurists. In a collection of the *Panchatantra* tales made in the early twelfth century there was added the story of the weaver who, falling in love with the princess of the realm, carried on his amour in the pretended form of Vishnu. The weaver thought that since he himself was a Vaishya, the affair with the princess was legitimate for she too could have been born of a Vaishya mother.⁷

With such variations in perceptions of the status of different artisan communities, one may expect a great deal of variations in the restrictions imposed on them. On the one hand, the legal texts prescribed that the antyajās or people other than the four varṇas had to live outside the town or at its extreme limits. On the other hand, other texts show that 'artisans and craftsmen of various categories' were settled in different quarters of the capital seats of rulers. There appears to be no difference of opinion, however, that the leather-workers and other menial castes had to live outside towns and villages inhabited by the four varṇas.⁸

One has also to consider the place unskilled labour occupied in the social scheme. It is reasonable to suppose that a number of the menial castes formed a seasonal reserve for field labour in the countryside, and that labour of the unskilled kind in the towns was similarly provided by some of the antyaja castes. It is impossible to think that members of the many lowly castes stuck only to the professions that were traditionally assigned to them, and did not supplement, or indeed replace them as need arose, by other forms of work, especially unskilled labour, which did not impinge on the prescribed preserve of any other caste. An element of some flexibility, then, must always have been present.

II

The Arab conquest of Sind and southern Punjab (710–14) is described in detail in the *Chachnāma*, but we have little information as to what happened subsequently when the area was governed by the caliph's representatives and local potentates. It is, however, clear from the *Chachnāma* that the Arab conquerors did not come with any intention of overthrowing the local social structure. Upon occupying the city of Brahmanabad, the Arab commander Muhammad ibn Qāsim granted protection to 'artisans, merchants and common people' of the city, said elsewhere to number 10,000 men, on whom he levied jizya at the lowest rates. Characteristically, the Brahmans continued to be the mediators and tax-collectors as in the previous regime.⁹ The confirmation of the constraints imposed on the pastoral Jats is good testimony to the fact that there was no intention to disturb the caste system.¹⁰

This early encounter between Islam and the Indian caste system anticipated very largely what happened when the Delhi sultanate was established early in the thirteenth century. By this time the fundamental elaborations of Islamic jurisprudence had been completed. These duly recognized the inequalities in the present world; and the principle of hierarchy was a universal principle in current Muslim ethics. When the critics of Sultan Iltutmish's minister Nizām-ul Mulk Junaidi (d.1236) wished to undermine his position, the allegation was made that he was descended from a weaver (*julāha*).¹¹ But if upward mobility was looked

down upon, there was no disapproval laid in Islamic social ethics on horizontal mobility: any one could adopt any artisanal profession of his choice. Nor was the practice of endogamy prescribed for the professions. There is, therefore, little doubt that as the number of Muslim artisans grew in northern India they could not form part of the caste system in its classic form.

One can imagine that the initial impetus to the establishment of Muslim communities in the towns of the Delhi sultanate came from migrations. Muslim immigrants came from the towns that had been under Muslim rulers for two centuries or more, like Multan, Uch, and Lahore, or from farther afield. Even when one discounts poetic exaggeration, there was some element of reality in Isami's (1350) claim that Delhi under Iluttmish attracted to itself:

a number of the Prophet's descendants of genuine lineage [who] came from Arabia; many accountants from Iran; many painters from China; many scholars from Bukhara; many pious and prayerful men from every country; artisans from every country and of every kind; beautiful ones from every city and every race; many experts in judging gems; and gem-sellers beyond computation; Greek scholars, Byzantine physicians; many men of science from every country.¹²

Another source of addition to the numbers of Muslim artisans was the increasingly large bodies of slaves that military expeditions and rural raids produced. Not only were these slaves used for unskilled, domestic work, but also trained for skilled professions. If in 'Alauddin Khalji's reign (1296–1316) an untrained slave-boy cost 7 or 8 tankas, a 'trained' slave cost 10 to 15 tankas.¹³ Sultan Firoz Tughluq (1351–88) had 12,000 artisans among his slaves.¹⁴ At the other end was the mystic Nur Turk (fl. 1236), of an independent bent of mind, living on the earnings of his slave, who worked as a cotton-carder.¹⁵

How far the ranks of Muslim artisans were added to by conversions of free men is not easily established. References to such individual conversions in contemporary accounts are astonishingly few, and none of any individual artisan has been traced. Yet by 1500 there was already a community of Muslim weavers at Banaras (Varanasi) to which the great monotheist Kabir belonged.¹⁶ Such artisanal conversions, as Professor Mohammad Habib emphasized, seem to have been largely confined to the towns, at least in regions where the peasantry did not convert on any scale to Islam (that is, outside the Indus basin and eastern Bengal). There is no strong evidence that these urban conversions were necessarily brought about by any special concessions, such as free entry into towns, that the new regime offered to low-caste artisans, though the possibility cannot also be dismissed altogether.¹⁷ Weavers at any rate are included among the *antyajas* by Alberuni, as we have seen, and so had been especially looked down upon in the old order.

It is fairly clear at the same time that a large number of Hindu artisans also remained in the towns and continued to pursue their professions for the benefit of the new rulers. What is remarkable is that this should have happened in the building industry, where, given the more favoured arcuate forms of Saracenic architecture, with which Indian builders were unfamiliar, one would have expected immigrant Muslim masons to have taken charge immediately. The fact that the early sultanate buildings, including both mosques and tombs, lack the true arch and dome, suggests strongly that masons versed in the trabeate techniques continued to work on the buildings of the sultans and their nobility. Indeed, no true arch survives from any Delhi building before the reign of Sultan Balban (1266–86), and no dome before that of 'Alāuddin Khalji (1296–1316). We need not be surprised, therefore, to find masons' inscriptions in corrupt Sanskrit and local dialect left on the Qutb Minar at the time of its original construction (samvat 1256/AD 1199) and during

subsequent repairs in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁸ An architect (*sūtradhāra*) in samvat 1426 / AD 1369 not only gives his name as Chāhada, son of Devapāla, but invokes the grace of the deity Viśvakarma; a year earlier on the same repair work four masons (*sūtra*) record their names as Nānā, Sālhā, Lolā, and Lashmana.¹⁹ Similarly, at Jaunpur, Hindu masons recorded their names and prayers in Nagari inscriptions at the Atala Masjid and Lal Darwaza Masjid in the latter half of the fourteenth century.²⁰

The town artisans now necessarily formed a religiously mixed class. (The statement attributed to Babur [1526–30] that in India ‘all artisans, wage-earners and officials are Hindus’ is a mere case of mistranslation).²¹ The close coexistence of the two religions among urban artisans forms an important backdrop to the popular monotheistic movement that attained such strength during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. As Guru Arjan (d.1606) underlines in a memorable verse, the great teachers of this movement (outside Sikhism) came from lowly artisanal professions: The earliest, Namdev, was a calico-printer (*chhīparo*); Kabīr was a ‘lowly weaver’ (*nīch kulā jolāharo*); Ravidas a cobbler (*dhuvanta dhor*); and Sain a barber (*nāī*).²² Among Akbar’s contemporaries, Dadu of Marwar was a cotton-carder (*naddāf*)²³ and Ḥassu (Ḥasan) of Lahore was an oil-presser (*telī*).²⁴ All these teachers rejected the ritual of both the Hindus and Muslims, and directly sought to recognize God. They are obviously addressing an audience composed of both Hindus and Muslims. Given their composition in popular dialects, one can almost visualize an urban assemblage of artisans as an important part of their constituency.

Such an impression grows when one reads in Kabīr of God as a Weaver (*kōn*), of the universe as his stretched warp (*tanāio tānā*); or elsewhere of the humble suppliant, as a weaver (*julāhe*), who has recognized God (Rām).²⁵ Again, the weaver (*julāho*) is the soul that weaves cloth (body) to specifications and then makes it its home.²⁶ And if we pass by these craft allegories, we see Kabīr imagining God in the absolute form of the master the artisan knew so well: the merchant-usurer, on whose advances he subsisted:

My Lord [*Sā’īn*] is a Baniya. He carries on his commerce so easily: Without scale and balances he weighs the entire universe.²⁷

Or the terror that is invoked of him as a stern usurer:

Kabir, the capital [*pūnjī*] belongs to the *sāh*, and you waste it all
There will be great difficulty for you at the time of the rendering of accounts.²⁸

It was perhaps to be expected that when two branches of this great movement, the Satnāmīs and the Sikhs, rose against the Mughal empire in its later days, the lowly artisan also took his place alongside the peasant rebel.²⁹

III

Unlike the Delhi sultanate, there does not seem to have been any significant use of slave labour in craft production in Mughal India. In some parts of the country, notably Kerala and eastern Bihar, slaves or bonded labourers were used in agricultural operations, but taking agricultural labour in India as a whole, individual slavery seems to have been a rare exception.³⁰ The caste system, on the other hand, constituted the major element of constraint on the hereditary ‘menial’ labourers. The structure of the village community, which is studied in a separate chapter in this volume, bound them in a network of obligation and limited recompense. A particular mark of lowly status of the rural labouring castes was

their obligation to render *begār* (forced and usually unpaid labour) to village headmen, zamindars, and officials. 'Menial' castes such as Balāhars, Thoris, Dhānuks, and Chamārs were obliged to act as porters and guides whenever called upon to do so.³¹ Sometimes, the burden of *begār* was placed on the peasants as well: in 1670 the Kewats, a subdivision of the peasant caste of Kurmis in a village of Kalinjar needed to obtain in 1670 the confirmation of a previous exemption from *begār*.³² *Begār* was, by and large, a rural imposition; and there is little evidence of it in the larger towns. In Kashmir, where the practice was especially widespread, Akbar took care to proclaim in an inscription placed on the main gate of his Nagarnagar fort at Srinagar that, in building it, 'no one rendered *begār* here; all obtained wages from the treasury'.³³

Within the village, certain land allotments were made to members of particular castes to secure their obligation to render certain services to the village or its dominant caste. Some return was also assured to them by certain customary petty shares in the harvests.³⁴ A reserve of manual and artisanal labour was thus kept attached to the countryside by caste and custom, forming, by any standards, a massive rural proletariat.

In the towns, on the other hand, market conditions generally prevailed: labourers could offer themselves for employment on money wages; artisans could sell their wares directly in the bazaar, or work for particular merchants against advances; and some worked on wages in workshops or *kārkhānas*.³⁵ Yet one must remember that social structures and customs also affected market relationships in numerous ways.

Let us begin with the building industry. Miniatures of Akbar's time illustrating scenes of construction work at the forts of Agra and Fatehpur Sikri tell us, what from modern conditions we could have presumed, that women worked at transporting bricks and breaking limestone, a feature seldom found outside India.³⁶ Such castes as allowed their women to work on construction sites would thus be employed more readily, since the wages paid to women were always far less than those paid to men. Thus, when in 1648 the top storey of the Qutb Minar was repaired, the four stone-cutters (*sangtrāsh*) described themselves in a Nagari inscription as *chaṇḍāla-vāmsi*, that is, of the menial or Chandala lineage.³⁷ The menial castes obviously came cheaper to the employers.

The caste system itself affected greatly the state of supply of skilled labour. Hereditary occupation and endogamy were the twin features of the caste system that external observers were most prone to remark on.³⁸ This naturally promoted traditional skills; and where women participated in the pursuit of the craft, as in dyeing and calico-printing, endogamy ensured that the wife upon marriage came with the skill that she had learnt as a girl in her parents' home. The skill so accumulated and transmitted made it possible to have artisanal products of great quality produced with the rudest of instruments and so with the minimum of capital expenditure.³⁹ One could, therefore, expect the caste system to have reduced costs and wages for the employers of the artisans.

On the other hand, occupational fixity must always lead to a mismatch between supply and demand. Max Weber further argued that the caste system by separating education from craft, segregating skills, preventing inter-craft mobility, and limiting individual ambition, constituted a severe break on economic development.⁴⁰ There is no doubt that these points are important, but it may be equally valid to maintain that there were certain undoubted elements of flexibility that moderated the rigours of the caste order.

First of all, despite some tendency towards hereditary occupations among Muslims,⁴¹ the absence of legal constraints on changes of occupations among them meant that in the case of enhanced demand for a new craft, Muslims could more easily respond to it. This attitude was reflected in the apparent neutrality of the Mughal administration in respect of

caste monopolies of occupations. In 1665 Aurangzeb forbade an existing cess on apprenticeship that the local officials at Ahmedabad took from any person wishing to learn weaving and needlework of different kinds, which implies that outsiders were in fact joining these professions.⁴² In 1677 the emperor ordered that the monopoly of the Srīmāls over the work of smelting and wire-drawing in the Ahmedabad mint should be removed, since such a monopoly was not legally (*shar'an*) permissible.⁴³

There were also possibilities of adjustment within the caste system. First of all, several occupations attached to particular castes were either nominal or of a seasonal character, leaving caste members free to take to other employments. Thus, in the seventeenth century diamond-miners of southern India went 'back to tillage' once particular mines were closed.⁴⁴ Where the demand for certain products of specialized skill grew over time, there could be shifts in the occupations of certain castes. Fukazawa shows how in Maharashtra in the eighteenth century the Shinpis (tailors) took to dyeing and so became Rangaris. King Sahu in 1728 prohibited intermarriages between the two sections, which thus became two separate castes. In 1783 the Rangaris, thus separated, had begun to intermarry with a separate caste of indigo-dyers (Nilaris). This too was prohibited, but with what effect remains unknown.⁴⁵ The essential point is that the profession of dyers was enlarged by an influx from the caste of tailors, and, given the customs of endogamy, adjusted themselves almost spontaneously to the new circumstances.

The caste system divided the class of artisans and labourers into countless separate segments. Whatever adjustments the caste system underwent due to the pressure of altered economic circumstances, no matter how many castes split or coalesced, the fundamentals did not change. One wonders then how much, the social world of the menial village labourer and lowly town artisan was really different in the time of Aurangzeb from what it was in that of Alberuni.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- 2 *Ibid.*, pp. 420–21.
- 3 Cf. Suvira Jaiswal, *Caste: Origin, Function and Dimension of Change* (New Delhi: 1998), pp. 78–9.
- 4 Cf. Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perception* (New Delhi: 1995), pp. 124–5.
- 5 Edward C. Sachau (tr.), *Alberuni's India* (London: 1910), vol. I, pp. 101–2.
- 6 B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century* (Allahabad: 1973), pp. 45–7.
- 7 For this story being an early twelfth-century addition, A. Berriedale Keith, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (London: 1920), pp. 260–1. It was from this version rather than Pundrabhadra's *Panchakhyanaka* (1199) that Mustafā Khāliqdād made his Persian translation (c.1600) of a *Panchatantra* version he calls *Panchakhyan*. The story of the weaver Vishnu duly appears here (edited by Tara Chand and S.A.H. Abidi) (Aligarh: 1973), pp. 61–72. The passage on caste-affinity with the princess is on pp. 64–5. Incidentally, the false Vishnu succeeded with the aid of the real Vishnu, the fact of his being a weaver notwithstanding.
- 8 For the evidence on the subject of this paragraph, see Yadava, *Society and Culture in Northern India*, pp. 267, 269.
- 9 *Chachnāma* (edited by Umar bin Mahmud Daudpota) (Delhi: 1939), pp. 207–9.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 214–16.
- 11 Barani, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī* (Calcutta: 1862), p. 39.
- 12 Isami, *Futuḥ us-Salātīn* (AD 1350) (edited by A.S. Usha) (Madras: 1948), pp. 114–15.
- 13 Barani, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī*, p. 314.
- 14 Shams Siraj Afif, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhī* (edited by Wilayat Husain) (Calcutta: Bib. Ind., 1891), pp. 267–73.
- 15 Ḥasan 'Alī Sijzī, *Fawā'id al-Fuād* (edited by M. Latif Malik) (Lahore: 1966), pp. 334–5.

- 16 Kabīr himself uses both terms, *julaha* and *korī* for himself; today the former generally applies to a Muslim and the latter to a Hindu weaver. Whether Kabīr had this distinction in mind may be doubted. Cf. Hazariprasad Dwivedi, *Kabīr* (Bombay: no date), pp. 5–6 and n.
- 17 This argument has been mainly advanced in Mohammad Habib's introduction to H.M. Elliot and J. Dowson, *History of India as told by its own Historians* (Aligarh: 1952 [reprint]), vol. II, pp. 54–62.
- 18 Pushpa Prasad, *Sanskrit Inscriptions of Delhi Sultanate, 1191–1526* (Delhi: 1990), pp. 1–3, 18–22, 32–7.
- 19 Ibid., pp. 32–5.
- 20 Ibid., pp. 179–82.
- 21 The quoted rendering is that of A.S. Beveridge, *Memoirs of Babur* (London: 1921), vol. II, p. 518. The words in the original *Bāburnāma* (edited by Eiji Mano) (Kyoto: 1995), p. 466 are: 'āmīl o mustājir o kārguzār ('revenue-collectors, revenue-farmers and [lower-level] functionaries'). Wheeler M. Thackston's translation of *Bāburnāma* (New York: 1996) of these words as 'tax-collectors, artisans and craftsmen' is equally erroneous (p. 350).
- 22 *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, Ragu Asa Bhagat Dhanajiki: *Gobind, Gobind*, etc. (*Shrī Gurū Granth Sāhib*, Nagari edition (Amritsar: Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee, 1951), vol. I, pp. 487–8.
- 23 *Dabistān-i Mazāhib*. (edited by Nazar Ashraf) (Calcutta: 1809), pp. 267–8. This work was completed c.1653.
- 24 Śurāt Singh, *Tazkira-i Pīr Hassū Telī*, written, 1647, unique MS in Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. Hassu died in 1603.
- 25 *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, Nagari text, vol. I, p. 484.
- 26 Ibid., p. 335.
- 27 *Kabīr Granthāvalī* (edited by Shyamsundardas) (Kashi [Varanasi]: vs 2008/AD 1950–51), p. 62.
- 28 Ibid., p. 42.
- 29 Cf. Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556–1707* (New Delhi: 1999 [2nd revised edition]), pp. 395–8.
- 30 Ibid., pp. 142–3.
- 31 Evidence with references is offered in *ibid.*, p. 181 and pp. 181–2 and n.
- 32 Sihunda Documents, no. 66, Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.
- 33 Text of the inscription in Pīr Ghulām Ḥasan Khoyhāmī, *Tārīkh-i Ḥasan* (Srinagar: 1954), I, p. 387. An inscription containing a farmān of Shah Jahan, AD 1633, forbidding all kinds of begār was set up on the gate of the Jami Masjid, Srinagar (Shireen Moosvi, 'Administering Kashmir: an Imperial Edict of Shah Jahan, *Aligarh Journal of Oriental Studies*, vol. III, no. 2, 1986, pp. 141–50, where the date given for the farmān needs to be corrected).
- 34 Cf. Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, pp. 156–8.
- 35 Cf. I. Habib, *Essays in Indian History: Towards a Marxist Perception* (New Delhi: 1995), pp. 218–23.
- 36 A.J. Qaisar, *Building Construction in India: the Evidence from Painting* (Delhi: 1988), plates 3–7.
- 37 Prasad, *Sanskrit Inscriptions of Delhi Sultanate*, p. 217.
- 38 Beveridge, *Memoirs of Babur*, vol. II, p. 518; Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, AD 1656–1668* (translated by A. Constable; revised by V.A. Smith) (London: 1916), p. 259.
- 39 The point is made in Karl Marx, *Capital* (Moore-Aveling translation, edited by Frederick Engels) (London: 1887), I, pp. 331–2.
- 40 These points are discussed (and discounted) in an important essay by Morris D. Morris, 'Values as an Obstacle to Economic Growth in South Asia', *Journal of Economic History*, vol. XXVII, December 1967, pp. 588–607.
- 41 Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, p. 259.
- 42 'Alī Muḥammad Khān, *Mirāt-i Aḥmadī* (edited by Syed Nawab Ali) (Baroda: 1928), I, p. 260.
- 43 Ibid., pp. 292–3.
- 44 Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India [1640–67]* (translated by V. Ball; revised by W. Crooke) (London: 1925), I, p. 230.
- 45 Hiroshi Fukuzawa, *The Medieval Deccan: Peasants, Social Systems and States: Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Delhi: 1991), pp. 101–3.

PART 3

CHAPTER 14

Medieval Kerala: State and Society

Kesavan Veluthat

Kerala, as an entity distinct from the rest of south India, came to acquire its socio-cultural identity at the beginning of the ninth century. Ideas and institutions typically Keralan started crystallizing themselves and a single state structure presided over most of present-day Kerala.¹ This political unity, however tenuous, got disrupted a little more than three centuries later;² but the economic, social, and cultural processes set in motion in the earlier period continued to work, and new elements, brought in particularly by maritime trade, were introduced. Vasco da Gama's appearance in Calicut at the end of the fifteenth century did not immediately usher in a new period in the history of Kerala.³ But the steady interference by European powers in affairs economic and political led to the gradual hooking of this part of the country too to the colonial state system. A prelude to this were the continual inroads of powers from Karnataka, starting with the Nāyaks of Ikkeri, and followed by Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan, in the northern parts of Kerala and the formation of a somewhat strong monarchical state in Travancore in the south. A clearly identifiable break in the history of Kerala is thus visible in these developments.⁴ Hence, the period from the ninth to eighteenth centuries is both distinct and intelligible as a chronological unit for the study of Kerala's history.

Social formation and state formation were not among the problems that historians of Kerala were concerned with in an earlier period.⁵ Researches in the past, meticulous though they were, addressed issues such as chronology and political history and at best aspects of economy, society and culture in isolation. To be sure, there is rich data and intelligent discussion available on the history of Kerala in relation to much of the period that we intend to take up. What is desired, however, is a perspective that views history as a process and not as a series of events. Therefore, we do not presume so much to undertake any fresh research here as arrange the already available pieces of information in a fashion that makes meaningful generalization possible. Such data, however, are not available uniformly for the whole millennium. There are areas where copious work is available; there are also areas where primary research, or even a search for data, remains a desideratum. For instance, the first three centuries of this period is relatively well lit thanks to the path-breaking

researches of Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai and M.G.S.Narayanan.⁶ For the next three centuries or so the studies are not as detailed and comprehensive, although some details are available here and there in the writings of Pillai, Raghava Varier, Rajan Gurukkal and the present writer.⁷ In the researches concerning the period after the sixteenth century, there is a marked tendency to use European sources in a bigger way and therefore the picture there tends to be heavily one-sided.⁸ Historians who wrote in the pre-Independence period, such as William Logan, K.P. Padmanabha Menon, and K.V. Krishna Aiyar, showed a tendency to speculate on the basis of very sketchy information, particularly drawn from the foreign accounts.⁹

I

During the 'Dark Ages' from the fourth to the eighth century, there are references in literature to gifts of land to fighters and Brahmans. The fighters or the priest-scholars did not cultivate the land by themselves. This meant the use of labour from outside the kin groups. The introduction of such extra-kin labour proved to be the thin end of the wedge, which resulted in the final erosion of the old system. The recently discovered inscriptions from Pūlāṅkurichi in Tamil Nadu demonstrate various shades of rights, that begin to emerge in land.¹⁰ So also we see various shades of political rights and power emerging, as documented in the later hero stones known as the *Cenḱam Naḱukarḱal*.¹¹ Following the differentiation in society that resulted from the opening up of the river valleys for cultivation in a big way, society with a graded hierarchy with innumerable shades in status came to be established and, with it, the state.

We come across a large number of Brahman settlements on the lower reaches of the more fertile river valleys by the ninth century.¹² They constituted the last links in a long chain of migration along the west coast, starting probably from Gujarat or further north, and cherishing the tradition of Paraśurāma.¹³ In fact, this is a tradition which the Nambudiri Brāhmans of Kerala share exclusively with other west coast Brahmans.¹⁴ Brahmans do not participate in this tradition in other parts of the peninsula. This migration need not be taken as a wave or waves; it was rather a process of what could be called 'leapfrogging'. In any case, these Brahman settlements that were established around temples in the river valleys came to be synonymous with so many agrarian corporations. The Brahmans possessed vast estates of land both as their individual property (*brahmasvam*) and as collective property in the name of the temple (*dēvasvam*). It is not possible to know how exactly these settlements were established, for the charters creating them, if they existed, have not come down to us. What is certain is that most of the settlements celebrated in the Brahmanical tradition of Kerala were well established by the ninth century.

By the close of the eighth century, thus, vast areas of land had been brought under the plough for the cultivation of rice, and a huge chunk of the tribal population transformed into peasants. This resulted in the production of unprecedented surplus and, through its unequal distribution, a crystallization of social stratification. As the whole process was under the initiative of the Brahmanical corporations, their organizations around the temples came to have immense influence on the economy and society. For one thing, since much of the land was under the control of these corporations, the Brahmans came to enjoy considerable economic privileges. They were naturally able to command a large number of privileges over the rest of the society. Thus, Brahmanical ideas and institutions, such as the *āgamaic* religion, *jāti*, and *varṇāśhramadharma*, came to be accepted in society. Social stratification was sanctified through the ideology represented by these principles. Thus, we

see that Kerala was marked by all the features necessary as a pre-condition for the formation of the state: the production of considerable agrarian surplus, stratification of society, and acceptance of a hegemonic ideology.

The very first epigraphic record from the plains of Kerala is a copper plate related to a place called Vāḷappallī near Tiruvalla in the south.¹⁵ Tiruvalla was one of the major Brahmanical settlements and Vāḷappallī was its subsidiary.¹⁶ The document, dated in the twelfth regnal year of Rājāśekhara, '*Rājarājādhirāja Paramēśvara Bhaṭṭāraka*' (c. 820), opens with the invocation '*namaśśivāya*'. The ruler mentioned is identified as the founder of the Cēra kingdom of Mahodayapuram. The very first record from Kerala announcing the presence of the state is thus heavily Brahmanical in character. Not only is it concerned with the affairs of a Brahmanical temple, regulating its services as well as landed properties, but the entire phraseology is permeated through and through with a Brahmanical ideology. It goes without saying that the state was presided over by a Kshatriya king who was supported in a big way by the Brahmanical groups. The Cēra king, who was described as the *perumāḷ* ('the great one') or simply *kō* in Tamil or *rājā* in Sanskrit, claimed Kshatriya status and was located in Mahodayapuram identified with modern Koduṅgallur in Trichur district.¹⁷ He was occasionally presented as *rāja-rājādhirāja* or *kō-kōnmaikoṇḍān* ('king of kings'). He was styled as *Mahodayapura-paramēśvara* ('the supreme lord of Mahodayapura') and *Keralādhinātha* ('the overlord of Kerala'), both descriptions representing important facts about the nature of polity in the state.¹⁸

The *perumāḷ* had a council of Brahman advisers known as the *nālu taḷi*.¹⁹ This council was present in important meetings of the king with other functionaries of the state during times of emergency and it was consulted in matters of importance such as the remission of tax. The importance of this council is not accidental. In fact, one of the major factors that brought about a transformation of Kerala in the second half of first millennium AD was the steady immigration of Brahmanical groups and their settlement in the fertile river valleys. They emerged as the major owning groups when private property emerged in land. The Brahmanical groups constituted a communitarian force with a strong sense of all-Kerala identity. Their own traditions testify to this sense.²⁰ According to it, the creator of the land itself, Paraśurāma, gave the entire land of Kerala as a donation to Brahmans from the north, who were settled in sixty-four villages between Gōkarṇa and Kanyākumāri. They carried out the governance of the land through a representative body of four villages. This body grew corrupt in course of time and the Brahman community realized that to rule was the function of the Kshatriyas. Accordingly, they invited a Kshatriya from outside and made him king of Kerala for twelve years. A new sovereign was brought in this way at the end of every twelve years. Four *grāmas*, known as the *nālu taḷi*, continued to be the advisers of the king. To be sure, there is no support in other documents to the elective character of the Cēra monarchy; nor do the long regnal periods of kings mentioned in inscriptions support the idea of a twelve-year term for the rulers. However, the Brahmanical prop that the throne had is not to be disputed. The king had a council called *nālu taḷi* at the capital with representatives from four important Brahman villages in the neighbourhood, and this council was present when the 'war council' met or an important decision such as the remission of tax was taken. Decisions taken in one of these villages, Mūlikkaḷam, regarding the nature of conduct for the Brahman members of the village committees had the privilege of setting the standard code of conduct, which was followed throughout Kerala.²¹ These Brahman villages, big and small, show evidence of the presence of the Cēra *perumāḷ* directly or indirectly, and the *perumāḷ* himself readily acknowledged his obligation to the Brahmans.²²

In all probability the temple of Kali, for which the town is famous today, existed in the capital city apart from these four big Brahmanical temples of the *nāḷu tali*. Members of the important Navar caste with their military pretensions, managed the affairs of this temple through their body called the *onnu kure āyiram* (The 'Thousand minus One'). The *āyiram* (the 'thousand') was, in fact, a body of the Cēra king's bodyguards, his 'Companions of Honour'.²³ Evidence of this body and its counterparts in the *nāḷu* divisions standing in close proximity with the ruler or the local chief is available in Cēra inscriptions. In the period after the perumāls the Nāvar militia or the 'Companions of Honour' attached to the local chiefs continued to worship in this temple. Epigraphs attest to the presence of these chiefs in an earlier period in important meetings with the king. Thus, we see that the Cēra king at Mahōdayapuram had in his establishment a council of Brahmans, the head of his trusted bodyguards, and the more important local chiefs apart from other members of the royal household on occasions. There is no evidence of anything that would approximate to a bureaucracy or a military arm; and the real power in the state appears to have been exercised by the chiefs at the local levels, the corporate bodies in the agrarian villages and the trading groups in the urban enclaves.

The local chiefs who exercised considerable power in the localities were of two major varieties: those who continued from an earlier period such as the Āy-vēls or the Mūṣhikas, and those who appeared along with the Cēra state. Among the latter were those who owed their position to an 'appointment' by the Cēra king and those who owed it to the principle of heredity. We come across about thirteen of them in the documents. They too had their 'Companions of Honour' in what are described as the 'Hundred' organizations.²⁴ In fact, the chiefs exercised a greater amount of real power than the Cēra sovereign himself. They fought wars with neighbours such as the Cōlas and Pāṇḍvas. They made grants of land and gave away considerable privileges, for example, to groups of traders. They are shown as so many 'feudatories' under the perumāḷ. The political structure, in short, appears to be that of a Cēra monarch enjoying a vague hegemony over a congeries of such chiefs with real political power. When it came to the exercise of power at actual grassroots level, the local groups in the agrarian villages and trading centres did it in a consummate manner.

The inscriptions from Kerala of this period have a peculiar feature. Most of the documents are from or related to agrarian villages, centred on temples, and managed by Brahman groups.²⁵ Evidence of a strong non-Brahman peasantry, present ubiquitously in the rest of south India in this period, is missing here.²⁶ This results in a heavy bias in favour of Brahmanical groups in a study of local groups and their organization. Nevertheless, it seems safe to imagine that these groups controlled most of the rice-producing land. The records speak about an uncompromising solidarity that they exhibited. They owned property as both *dēvasvam* and *brahmasvam*, and managed the affairs of the *ūr* (the village). These groups, also known as the *ūrār* (those of the village), met regularly in the temples and decided on important affairs such as the management of landed property, assignment of revenue, policing, law and order, etc. A lengthy record from Tiruvalla, a major Brahman settlement in south Kerala, sheds considerable light on the fabulously vast landed properties that a temple owned and the efficient way in which a Brahman village functioned as an important node of political power in the Cēra kingdom.²⁷ Each *ūr*, or *sabha* as it was otherwise known, consisting of a handful of Brahman landowners of the village, functioned as a corporate group and decided things in their meetings.²⁸ Members attended the meetings without fail and decisions were unanimous. Any abrogation of the decisions was punished ruthlessly invoking provisions in the *dharmaśāstras*.²⁹ Defaulters were ostracized and banished from the territory of the village. Their properties were confiscated and added to the

common pool of 'god's property'. This solidarity and sense of discipline, often bordering on the masochistic, helped in consolidating themselves and gaining dominance over the population over which they were originally a superimposed minority. They gained control over the majority of population, which was related to them in various subordinate ways. In the course of time this was also instrumental in dictating the shape of things in society and culture.

A similar pattern is observed in the way in which the trading centres functioned. Evidence of a few such centres is available to us,³⁰ with elaborate details about one of them, namely, Kurakkeni Kollam or modern Quilon.³¹ A body called *nagaram* controlled such urban enclaves. They had the same kind of autonomy as the agrarian villages. These *nagarams*, often controlled by organizations ('guilds' in the fashion of an earlier historiography), were called *anuvannam*, *manigramam*, etc. These bodies enjoyed considerable privileges in matters administrative, fiscal, and judicial. Traders of West Asian origin, such as Christians, Jews, and perhaps Muslims, were members of these bodies and had much influence in the urban centres. These trading centres enjoyed nearly everything of the autonomy and self-rule that characterized the agrarian corporations of the Brahmans. Operating from port-towns such as Kollam or Kodungallur, these centres functioned as entrepôts of international trade and, incidentally, gateways through which elements such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam entered this land. In the absence of quantifiable data, the role that such trade played in the economy is not easy to determine. However, given the geography and climate of the region where land is not exactly famous for its fertility, agriculture at best just sustained the population. The surplus produced was not sufficient to support an 'oriental' state with the attendant luxuries and monument building, which presents a sharp contrast with the situation obtaining elsewhere in contemporary south India. Naturally, there was absolute necessity and immense scope for the trading factor in the economy and polity of Kerala. The rulers welcomed these traders with open arms and, naturally again, Kerala witnessed the peaceful coexistence of all these religions. Kerala has been given unearned credit for religious toleration on this account, but as a modern historian has observed, 'charity began at the market place, for it will be difficult for us with our inhuman caste system to say that charity began at home'.³²

The presence of the state, which is clearly visible in the records, points to the existence of differentiation and stratification in society. Wetland agriculture in paddy had spread widely with the opening up of river valleys and the use of iron technology in a big way. No valid generalization can be made about the process of agrarian expansion. It involved the clearing of forests in certain areas, the levelling of undulating terrain in certain others, and the draining of waterlogged fields in yet others. Records show that temples possessed huge estates of land producing rice. It is safe to assume the existence of non-Brahman magnates as well, if not on a scale comparable with the rest of south India, for we see them making assignments of land to temples and other institutions.³³ The records bear testimony to their influential presence.³⁴ Thus, with agricultural production involving labour outside kinship, it was but normal that surplus was expropriated from the primary producer. There was also considerable diversification of production, since we come across evidence of artisanal activities of different kinds.³⁵

The primary producers were the labourers. There are references in the documents to labourers being tied to the land they worked. When ownership or other superior rights over a piece of land changed hands, the title over the labourers was also transferred along with it.³⁶ We have references to bonded labourers such as *āl*, *āl apīyār*, etc. Although there is no reference to *viṣṭi*, or its Tamil form *veṭṭi*, in the records from Kerala, the practice of

corvée was widely prevalent. Grants or other transactions of land mention the transfer of āḷ labourers, both male and female, along with such transactions. The sections of society so described are often identified by the names of the ethnic groups to which they belonged, names such as *Pulayar*, which denoted the castes of agrestic labourers in later times.³⁷ The surplus labour at their disposal was expropriated mostly in the form of a labour rent.³⁸ No other detail regarding these groups is available to us from Kerala. If contemporary accounts in Tamil literature are any indication, theirs was a miserable life.³⁹

The most visible section of population in the records consisted of those who occupied the middle rungs in the hierarchy of economic and social status. They included the numerous tenants of the vast land owned by the temples. The records mention various shades of rights in land. The existence of a graded hierarchy in land relations is a safe guess. Ranging from simple occupancy rights, we see that tenancy with some title, possession taken for some consideration, superior rights of a stronger nature, proprietary and beneficial rights bordering on the allodial, and so on were present. Those who enjoyed these rights naturally occupied a corresponding position in the social hierarchy immediately above the primary producers. So also those who provided various services in the temple, such as garland-making, musical services, cleaning, etc., were placed slightly above the rest on the scale on account of their doing what were considered as 'clean' jobs and their proximity to the temple and the Brahmans. Those who were engaged in the artisanal activities, such as the different varieties of smiths, carpenters, washermen, etc., were lower on the scale.⁴⁰ Native traders are rarely met with in the documents.⁴¹

From the identification of these groups, placed in hierarchical order based on economic and social status, so many *jātis* of corresponding ritual status follow. *Jātis* was a handy tool for the Brahmanical owning groups to assert their superiority. Invoking the principle of *varṇāśramadharma*, which provided the right kind of legitimacy to the differentiation in society and the position of the Brahmanical owning groups within it, the Brahmanical worldview was imposed, and accepted, with great ease. This is one of the peculiar features of Kerala society where, unlike other parts of south India, Brahmanical dominance was accepted, and it went on without much of a challenge till recently. The result was also the acceptance of the *agamaic* religion. As mentioned earlier, temples dedicated to Brahmanical deities such as Śiva and Viṣṇu had come up with command over fabulous amount of wealth. Nearly every section of society stood in a subordinate relationship to the temple in one way or the other on the secular plane; it was not difficult to translate this obligation into the religious world. Perhaps the earlier cults and practices continued, but what is visible in the most striking way is the religion of the temples with its ideology of *Bhakti*. The Tamil *Bhakti* movement⁴² of this period boasted two of its leaders from among the Cēra rulers themselves. Many of the sacred centres of the movement are on the west coast. At the higher levels of metaphysics and ethics, this was the period of the great Śankara, although the way in which he represented intellectual developments in Kerala is questionable.

Side by side with Brahmanical 'Hinduism', religions of West Asian origin such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam thrived in Kerala, at least in the coastal towns. We have elaborate details of the rights and privileges that the church of Tarsa was given at Kurakkēṇi Kollam.⁴³ So also the Jewish Copper Plates of AD 1000 tells us of the aristocratic privileges granted to a Jewish merchant. The signatures in the Syrian Christian plates testify to the presence of Islam.⁴⁴ The 'deity' consecrated in the Tarisappalli, the church of Tarsa, was referred to as *tēvar* (*deva*). An important offering to the *tēvar* was the sacred oil lamp as in the case of the Brahmanical temples. The incorporation of the local idioms in Christian religious ideas and practices show how the local mainstream culture had influenced them.

The fact that the patterns of worship in the temples had influenced Christian idioms does not show that the converse was also correct; these groups seem to have confined themselves to the coastal towns and remained traders for the most part. Much has been written based on the existence of these exotic creeds here, about the religious tolerance of the rulers of Kerala. In any case, their influence on society in a big way dates from a later period.

Far-reaching changes in the economy, society, and polity of Kerala were taking place by the first quarter of the twelfth century due to further expansion of plough agriculture in the wetlands.⁴⁵ Consequently, more centres emerged as nodes of political power, rendering the superordinate authority of the perumāl irrelevant. The last Cēra perumāl is said to have disappeared from the scene mysteriously, after partitioning his kingdom among his relatives and dependants, and without leaving anybody to succeed him to the throne.⁴⁶ What is important is not so much the historicity of this tale as the attempt it makes legitimize a *fait accompli*.

The locality chiefs of an earlier period, who functioned as 'feudatories' under the Cēra perumāls, and the new ones that came up, established themselves as rulers of their territories. These included the more powerful ones like the rulers of Vēṇād in the south and those of Kōlattunād in the north; there were also the upcoming ones such as those who were to become the Zamorin of Calicut or the rulers of Cochin. They exercised considerable power and had many features, including a mint, which are usually taken as indicating some sort of sovereignty. The lesser ones, such as Kurumpuraiyūrṇātu, Puṛakiṇṇātu, Kīlmalainātu, and Muñṇinātu, had not registered as much development, nor as much differentiation, on the social and political scale. Hence, they just functioned under the umbrella of one of these more powerful rulers. All of them claimed a donation from the last perumāl as the sanction behind that piece of furniture which they called their throne.

The area around the old capital, Mahodayapuram, was still under a weakling, perhaps of the same family of the perumāls. He had no territory to boast of and nothing in the form of other sources of power and resources. Nostalgia for old glories, however, continued in medieval Maṇipravāḷam (a blend of Malayalam and Sanskrit) and Sanskrit literature⁴⁷ where the rājā of Mahodayapuram was still the Cēramān Perumāl, described as rājā even by other rājās and the sovereign of the whole of Kerala. His residence was the *rājadhāni* guarded by the four-fold army, and the streets of that town were graced by comely women and cultivated men. The meagre trade with West Asia continued for some more time, but a cataclysmic flood and severe tectonic movements led to the closure of the port of Koḍuṅgallūr.⁴⁸ A whole new island, known as the Puduvaippu (the 'New Formation') was thrown up to the south, an event that is remembered to this day in the Puduvaippu Era reckoning from AD 1341. So also, a *kochali* (small port) was opened a few miles to the south. We do not hear about the ruler of Mahodayapuram any more; but a new base of power came up gradually around the newly opened kochali, which was eventually to become Cochin, the 'Queen of the Arabian Sea'. It is not clear whether there is any historicity in the claim that the house of Cochin, known as the Perumpadappu *svarupam*, is a direct continuation of the house of the Cēramāns. Such claims did legitimize the newly organized kingdom. The support that the old monarchy had from Brahmanical orthodoxy continued, which was only a liability in the changed circumstances. The rulers of Cochin had also to contend with their overgrown vassals, which stood in the way of their own power. Strife among the different branches of the family too was a source of weakness. Nor did they have much to lean on as a resource base in land revenue; but Jewish, Syrian Christian, and Arab traders supported this port in a big way and brought in revenue enough for the kingdom to sustain itself.⁴⁹

The different principalities, which came up on the ruins of the old kingdom, had already started competing among themselves for larger territory, greater prestige, and even in a bid to step into the shoes of the perumāl. The newly formed kingdom of Veṇāḍ, with Kollam or Quilon as its capital, had old political traditions dating back to several centuries.⁵⁰ Kollam also had the definite advantage of seaborne trade in an age of flourishing commerce with the Arabs and the Chinese. Veṇāḍ took out expeditions eastward across the Āruvāymoḷi and Shengottah passes to the other side of the Western Ghats to claim territories that were earlier under the Pāṇḍyas. The control that was established was feeble; but this brought in a heavy Tamil influence in the culture of Veṇāḍ. The expansion southward was of greater political and economic significance. The rice bowl of the Nāñchil region, in the present-day Kanyākumari district of Tamil Nadu, was certainly a prize catch, which supplemented the otherwise slender resource base of the kingdom.⁵¹ The control of the Ananta Padmanabha temple of Tiruvanthapuram which this conquest fetched for the ruler of Venad too, was crucial. It went a long way in the legitimization of the new monarchy. All this meant that among the 'successor states' of the Cēra kingdom, Veṇāḍ was destined to be one of the most significant.

II

In the northern half of Calicut, the kingdom of Kozhikode rose into prominence in the period following the perumāl era. The chiefs of Ēṛanāṭu, who were among the 'feudatories' of the Cēra perumāḷs, now became independent rulers styling themselves as the *kunṇalakkōn* or *śailābdhīśvara* ('Lord of Hill and Sea'), and claiming a donation of the last perumāl as the authority behind their power.⁵² They were to become the future Zamorins. They engaged themselves in a policy of 'die and kill to annex', a leave that they claimed to have had from the last perumāl himself.⁵³ Starting from a small landlocked territory, they first expanded to the north to include the region of the coast of Calicut. Calicut offered immense possibilities of Arab trade, to which the kingdom owed nearly everything. In fact, 'Calicut' is the Europeanized form of the Arabic variant 'kaalikuut' for the Malayalam place name, 'kozhikkode'. A hereditary Muslim noble, Shah Bandar, was in charge of the port of Kozhikode. He came to be known as *shabandra koyā* or simply *kozhikkottu koyā*.⁵⁴ It was he who is stated to have advised the Zamorin to acquire the right to preside over *māmākam* at the temple of Tirunavāya and assisted him in the venture.⁵⁵ This was one of the major festivals in medieval Kerala,⁵⁶ which offered considerable legitimacy to the Zamorin. The *koyā* came to have many privileges in the court and the rituals of the state, including the *māmākam*, which is also indication of the heavy influence that Arab trade and Muslims had in the life of Calicut. In the wake of his annexations, the Zamorin came to be the overlord of a large number of petty chieftains to the south of Calicut. He even knocked at the doors of Mahodayapuram, which, however, did not open before him. Eventually, the Zamorin emerged as the most powerful ruler in Kerala in the period between the disappearance of the last perumāl and the arrival of the Portuguese.

Kōlattunāḍ, operating from Ēḷimalai in the north, was the next powerful political entity in the northernmost limits of Kerala in this period. Closer to the Tulu-speaking regions of south Canara, this unit was somewhat special among the nāṭus under the perumāḷs. Its tradition dated from the early historical period.⁵⁷ The *Mūṣikavamśakāvya*, an eleventh century Sanskrit *kāvya* with claims to be historical, pertains to this nāṭu unit.⁵⁸ The submission of this nāṭu to the hegemony of the perumāḷs never being complete, it had a special

position even in that period. While other *nāṭu* units had their 'Hundred Organizations', this one had its 'Thousand', a privilege which the *perumāḷ* had reserved for himself. Inscriptions from the region as well as from the neighbouring Āḷupa kingdom further north refer to the 'Thousand' of Kolam.⁵⁹ In the post-Cēra period Kolattunāḍ retained much of its old position. Even here, the resource base was trade rather than agriculture. Ēḷimalai, the Mount d'Eli of European writers, was the first landfall for voyagers in the Arabian Sea. There were ports such as Māṟāhi (modern Mādāyi), Valabhapaṭṭaṇam (modern Valapattanam), Dharmapaṭṭaṇam (modern Dharmadam), etc., which were all built by the Mūṣika rulers and frequented in a later period by Arab and Chinese traders. The region was also blessed with a hinterland rich in hill products such as pepper, cardamom, and other spices, which these traders were here to collect.

There were a large number of other chieftaincies with varying sizes of territories and power. Some accepted the overlordship of bigger powers in the neighbourhood; others stood obstinate. In any case, none of them had a strong monarchy. The structure of power in these and even the lesser political units shows that it was a continuation and a development from the time of the *perumāḷ*s. On the face of it, there was a setback in matters political as there was a loss of the unity of the whole of Kerala, and the central authority that ostensibly presided over it gave way to what looked like anarchy characterized by a heterogeneous assortment of bickering fragments. If, however, one frees oneself from the obsession that a larger political unit represents a more developed political form, it can be seen that this involved, in reality, a maturing of the political forces at work in an earlier period. In the case of the newly emerged 'kingdoms' and the lesser units of power, it was a fulfilment of what had begun earlier.

A complex institution called the *svarūpam* gets defined in this period. This expression is used in the general sense of a ruling house; but its significance went beyond this narrow dynastic sense.⁶⁰ An important feature about the *nāṭu*s under the *perumāḷ*s was the existence of the senior and the junior positions of the chief: what is described in the sources as *mutta kuru* and *ilaya kuru*. This obtained in almost every new political entity in the post-*perumāḷ* era. Since these positions were clearly defined, there was little scope for disputed succession and wars on that account. In fact, in the house of Neḍiyiruppu, the family of the Zamorins of Calicut, positions to the sixth prince, each with clearly defined rights and duties, were recognized. However, there was another source of trouble: the existence of disputes among competing branches of the chiefly houses. In fact, in the dynastic histories of Cochin or Travancore, or any other major or minor ruling family of pre-modern Kerala, such disputes were far too many. There have even been cases of friction in that neighbouring chiefs took part on one side or the other, leading to occasions what historians have, incongruously, described as 'the War of Vettam Succession'.⁶¹

These chiefly houses in the principalities, or *svarūpams*, did not enjoy any absolute political power. There were numerous local nodes of power. There were, for instance, the numerous magnates that had come up. They functioned as petty chiefs in their own rights. This category included potentates that came to be known as *nāḍuvāḷis* and *dēśavāḷis*. They had a few villages under their control. Many of them had military pretensions. They were the products of a further expansion of agriculture in the plains. The 'Companions of Honour' of an earlier period had become more localized by now with these lesser heroes wielding the military arm. Several groups of militia known as *caṅgātam* (literally, 'camaraderie' or 'companionship'), which took up *kāval* ('watch and ward'), came up during this period. Professional classes/castes of fighters in the Nayars and mercenaries in the Ilava or Tīya were also something that crystallised in this period.

There were also the local groups such as the Brahmanical village. These units, controlled by the village assembly of the Brahman landowners in the past, continued that way in this period, but the corporate solidarity characterizing such units was no longer visible. Dominance of individual houses took its place. The insistence on full attendance and unanimity is not seen any more. Attendance by proxy as well as majority decisions take their place. The slow process of a prosperous Brahman settlement coming under the control of a single Brahman house is demonstrated by the documents of the Trikkandiyūr temple.⁶² Such temples, whether under the control of a single house or a few houses, came to be the virtual masters of the territory around them in course of time. These units came to be known as *sanketams* with immunity against the political lords in most matters.⁶³ This too was the continuation, and fulfilment, of the process of agrarian expansion that had started in an earlier period.

The growth of the Brahman bodies into such strength had its implications for both the structure of polity and the process of political evolution. The place that the *nālu talī* had in an earlier period appears to have been completely lost. Surely there was no role for the king's council in the absence of the king. The body survived for some more time as a matter of ritual, but individual Brahman *grāmas* emerged as more consequential in the localities. A very important case is that of Panniyūr and Cōkiram, two villages on the left bank of Bharatappuzha. They were sufficiently influential early on and, naturally, fell out with each other. Their importance is attested to by epigraphy, while the quarrels between the two are the subject of literature.⁶⁴ Panniyūr, which was slightly lower in terms of ritual status, was patronized by the Zamorins seeking Brahmanical support of any kind, while Cochin, with their claims to a higher status, espoused the cause of Cōkiram. It was a matter of social and ritual precedence to begin with, but it acquired political overtones in the years to come. Gradually, what began as a quarrel between two Brahmanical villages acquired all-Kerala dimensions, the accounts of which left behind by foreign writers in and after the period of Vasco da Gama are as copious as they are interesting.

Such organizations with their autonomous realm were not confined to Brahmans alone. We come across units called *kalakam* among the non-Brahman groups, particularly in the northern extremities of Kerala. There were similar units in the *taṛa*, *kara*, etc. in the southern parts. Each was dominated by a particular caste and had jurisdiction over a defined geographical territory. Such bodies are usually seen as constituted and controlled by castes with command over land or other means of production and some military pretensions. They also looked after the shrines of the 'folk' deities of the particular locality and the periodical festivals in them, which brought to them some social significance. Groups that were engaged in the actual process of production are not, however, visible in the records except marginally. Where they do appear, they are unlettered, quarrelsome, and despicable, apt to be exploited in every way.⁶⁵

As mentioned earlier, these developments resulted from an all-round expansion of agriculture. One feature of agricultural expansion in this period was that it did not just mean a simple growth of the area of land brought under the plough. There was a certain amount of diversification of agricultural production as well. References in literature, both indigenous and foreign, testify to the existence of 'cash crops' such as coconut, betel-nut, pepper, cardamom, etc.⁶⁶ Side by side, there was also an expansion of artisanal activities, most of which were related to agriculture in one way or another. Smithy in various metals, carpentry, masonry, textile production, etc. are in evidence. The list of articles imported from South-East Asia and West Asia includes copper, zinc, and mercury, items necessary in the craft of braziers.⁶⁷ All this also meant further refinements in the graded hierarchy of

caste society to which more and more castes and sub-castes were added as more and more professional groups came into being as so many endogamous kinship groups. Even here, the point of reference in fixing the ritual status was contact with Brahmanical groups. This hegemony got strengthened in the matter of religion. The non-Brahmanical cults and practices continued, but got increasingly subjected to a process of acculturation by which the innumerable folk deities were identified as a son or a daughter or some other relative of one of the deities of the *agamais* pantheon. Some kind of a network of temples and deities also emerged through this kinship and through stories about the peregrinations of deities.⁶⁶ Religions of a West Asian origin, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, continued to flourish in the coastal region. Some of them had even been identified as so many jatis and accepted many of the typical 'Hindu' ways in social practices and rituals.

Elaborate accounts of trade are available, particularly overseas trade with West Asia and South-East Asia. In fact, Kerala functioned, from very early on, as an important point on what could be described as a trade arc connecting South-East Asia and West Asia. This had come to be institutionalized in the age of the *perumals*, to which documents such as the Syrian Christian Copper Plates and the Jewish Copper Plates testify. In the period that followed this was taken further. We start getting evidence of the continued prosperity and further expansion of trade with the West from numerous accounts of Arab and European travellers in this period. Recent studies have brought to light the magnitude and direction of trade with China as well.⁶⁷ A major factor that this new understanding of trade brings out is the relative poverty of the land where even rice, the staple food of the population, had to be imported. It is also recognized that the participation of traders from the Indian side was marginal. We do come across Malayali merchants in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu in this period,⁶⁸ but much of the overseas trade appears to have been carried on by foreigners.

This trade brought the Europeans to Calicut. Historians in the past have waxed eloquent about the momentous change that the arrival of Vasco da Gama brought about in the history not only of Kerala but of the whole world. This picture is overdrawn at least in the case of Kerala.⁶⁹ There was brisk trade with the Western world in Calicut even before his arrival. The Arab Muslims were the middlemen in this trade. Portuguese entry had only marginal impact on it. To begin with, they were here as healthy competitors in the trade going on in the port towns. When the Portuguese did not play the game according to its rules, Calicut no longer offered them hospitality, whereupon they turned to Cochin. The latter received the Portuguese with open arms for two reasons. For one, any opportunity for trade was welcome for the newly developed *kochali*. Second, following the old law of politics that an enemy of the enemy is a friend, Cochin saw in the Portuguese prospective allies in their not-so-happy relations with Calicut.⁷⁰ This gave the Portuguese entry into the world of political squabbles in Kerala, on which they capitalized in both trade and politics. In the political structure of Kerala, however, this hardly had any effect. Life went on in the same old way of petty feuds among the principalities. Society and economy in the sixteenth century hardly bore any stamp of the presence of the Portuguese. Indeed, previously unknown fruits and vegetables such as cashew, pineapple, breadfruit, papaya, chilli, potato, etc. from other tropical climes were added to the list of agricultural products and to the table. Portuguese pretensions of an overseas empire did not have any effect on the people of Kerala as it did not involve any colonial features comparable to the experience under the British in a later period.

The fortunes of the old Christian community in Kerala, however, were affected. As mentioned earlier, the Syrian Christian community in Kerala was well established with a strong tradition of many centuries. They had their affiliations to the Patriarch of Babylon,

who used to appoint the bishop and the archdeacon as their spiritual head. The Christians were nearly completely nativized, to the extent of being identified as one of the *jātis*.⁷³ Their archdeacon, known as the *jātikku kartavyan* ('responsible for the caste') was very independent. The hegemony of Brahmanical Hinduism in Kerala was so pervasive that it had considerably influenced the rituals and rules of conduct of the Christians. This ensemble was known as 'the law and patterns of worship of St Thomas' ('*Mārthāmayuṭe mārgavum valipāṭum*'). The Portuguese, coming here 'in search of spices and Christians', were mortified to see the kind of heresies that were going on in the community. Brought up in the atmosphere of Counter-reformation and armed with engines of coercion such as the Inquisition, they could hardly look on when a community calling themselves Christians went a way diametrically opposed to their own. Hence, a grand synod of all Christians was held in 1599 at Diamper (Udayampērūr in Malayalam) under Dom Menezes, governor and bishop of Goa.⁷⁴ The purpose of this synod was to make the Christians reject their affiliations to Babylon. It was insisted that 'the Nestorian Bishops who came to Kerala from Babylonia [*sic*] were thieves [and] murderers of the folk'.⁷⁵ The Malabar Christians were forced to conform to the idea of 'one shepherd and one flock upon earth'. They also had to submit to the Roman Catholic church and papal authority—the 'Law of St Peter'. It was also demanded with characteristic arrogance that they reject all that they had held dear for centuries. Supreme among the losses was the solidarity they had and the feeling that they were an integral part of the society of Kerala. Political pressure and a certain amount of helplessness dictated that they acquiesce, and the very foundations of a whole community were dismantled. However, a major section reacted sharply, as the somewhat violent 'Oath of the Coonen Cross' (1653) testifies to.⁷⁶ The Christian community in Kerala was never the same again; communal indifference too became a thing of the past.

Along with the loss of this communal harmony, there were also symptoms of communal hatred. As early as the end of the sixteenth century, we hear Shaikh Zainuddin Makhdum giving a call for a jihad in his famous book *Tuhfat ul-Mujahidin*.⁷⁷ To be sure, that call was for struggle against the Portuguese and their ungodly ways. But the way in which Makhdum sought to identify Muslims as one community and organize them in the name of religion against a common political danger should not be lost sight of. There is nothing on record to show any unpleasant relationship between the Hindus on the one side and the Muslims on the other. The *Paranki* (the Portuguese) was the object of hatred in the beginning. Gradually, however, communal identity got consolidated. Political ambitions of the newly formed community started looking at those who had political influence with suspicion. What was a haven of communal harmony gradually got transformed into a hotbed of communal distrust and even suspicion. In any case, no major communal violence or outrage is recorded in this period, which surfaced only in the nineteenth century under the English East India Company.

The Dutch did not quite meddle with social matters; they were happy with trade and interference in politics was necessary for furthering their commercial interests.⁷⁸ They dealt with the kingdoms of Calicut, Cochin, and Venad variously. It did not, however, alter the political structure substantially except that it gave the necessary push for the kingdom of Venad to emerge as Travancore, one of the most powerful kingdoms in south India in the eighteenth century. The French power was too marginal to have any political consequence and so was that of the English in the seventeenth century. The English factories at Tellicherry and Anjengo did not have any major political consequence in that context.⁷⁹

Despite the increasing involvement of European powers and some inflow of cash, the economy continued to be largely agrarian during this period. The increased production of

cash crops did bring about some changes in the structure of agrarian economy although the rise of huge estates as, for example, in coconuts had to wait for another century and those in rubber, coffee, etc. yet another. With the economy rooted in traditional agriculture, social and economic structures did not witness changes of any significance. The old hierarchy continued in the relations of production and was reflected and legitimized in *jāti* in a most comprehensive manner. The same hierarchy expressed itself in the political relations as well. Landed magnates, whether institutions like the temples or individuals like the putative lords, wielded great power and authority. *Saṅkēṭams* around temples developed into virtually independent territorial units. More important than that was the growth of those 'lords' with both land control and military pretensions. A whole corpus of folk literature related to such 'Cheroes' is available in what is known as the *Vaṭakkan Pāṭṭukal* (the 'Northern Ballads'), in which a class of such military heroes is represented and a section of mercenaries who had made war a means of livelihood are depicted.⁸⁰ In Travancore in the south the combination of military power with landed wealth in some of the Nayar magnates appeared deadly for the monarchy, at least for a while.

However, promptly assisted by commercial prosperity and the Dutch readiness to make hay while the sun shone, the monarchy in Travancore succeeded in putting down such elements and establish itself convincingly.⁸¹ As a fitting finale to the entire episode, the Dutch in their turn were defeated by the same monarchy of Travancore in the famous battle of Colachel.⁸² The northern regions did not share this fate, although there were bleak prospects under Śaktan Tampurān of Cochin for the establishment of a strong monarchical state there.⁸³ Given the resource base of that 'kingdom', it is not surprising that his efforts did not meet with success. Further north, barring the Zamorin of Calicut, there was no political power strong enough to try such an experiment.⁸⁴ The entire region lay fragmented without the wherewithal to attempt any such 'unification'. In the northern extremities continual incursions from the ambitious Nayaks of Ikkeri, one of the 'successors' of the once mighty Vijayanagar empire, had made times very hard for people and politics alike.⁸⁵ They established actual political control over the whole of the present-day Kasaragod district as half a dozen Ikkeri forts bear testimony to.⁸⁶ The hated memory of Ikkeri rule continues to this day. An inscription from a temple near Taliparamba in Kannur district speaks about the vandalism that the Ikkeri depredations had caused.⁸⁷ As far as the northern parts of Kerala were concerned, when Haider Ali led his raids across the land after defeating the Nayaks of Ikkeri and Chitradurga, it was only a repeat performance. The native accounts do not mention the *nabhavu* (nawab) with any particular hatred.⁸⁸ Even when he descended on Kerala for a second time, this time across the Palghat Gap, there was no major demurring. It is only the raids of Tipu that are remembered with some bitterness.⁸⁹ In any case, what father and son had acquired in Kerala passed on smoothly to the English East India Company in 1792.

The reports of the early representatives of the Company in Kerala give a somewhat clear picture of state and society in Kerala on the eve of the eighteenth century. The entire land was more or less settled. Land was held mostly as agricultural land, although patches of waste, including forest land, were known. A graded hierarchy of rights obtained in land, which was defined clearly under the colonial masters for purposes of revenue administration. The hierarchy in the relations of production was reflected in society as well, which found expression in *jāti*. There was no superordinate political authority with command over the whole of Kerala. A large number of chiefs with varying degrees of power and authority obtained with territories of varying size also. The elaborate treaties and engagements, which the Company entered into, give evidence of the kind of polity it replaced: an

(RV X 102.1). Water hose for carrying water to a particular spot finds mention in the *Rgveda* (VIII 69–12). Although the normal size of the field is not mentioned, the use of *sira* type of plough with 24 bullocks suggests that the field was large. Between two fields, there was a strip of wasteland called *khila*, kept for grazing and temporary habitation during the reaping season (RV VI 28.2).

ANIMALS

In reference to animals, the *RV* mentions 3 categories (*vayavya* flying?), *Aranya* (wild beasts) and *grāmya* (domesticated). Among wild animals, lion and wolf are mentioned in *RV* and the tiger in later texts. The chariot of the Asvins was yoked with the bull and the *sisumāra*, a crocodile-like animal (RV I. 116–18). The propitiation of the frog for rains is referred to in the *Rgveda* (VII 103) and *Atharvaveda* (IV 15.13). *Nakra* is another type of crocodile mentioned in *AV*.

DOMESTICATED ANIMALS OF THE VEDIC PERIOD

Animals such as cow bull/bullock, horse, sheep and dog were popular beasts. The stud bull was left to roam among the cows for procreation. The zoomorphism of Indra becomes evident from the hymn (RV, VI. 28.8) which says ‘may this sprinkling be sprinkled in the cows. That which is in the semen of the bull. O Indra, be it the same is in thy manly fluid’. Perhaps the Indus seal depicting the bull as symbolic of Indra.

THE BULL AND PLOUGH RITUALS

Dange remarks that the stud bull was also used for the symbolic fructification of the field by making the beast walk and urinate in the field. The plough was sprinkled with *soma* juice and the ploughshare was symbolically sharpened by stone axes (RV X 101.10–11). This is a clear indication of Neolithic antecedents of the Vedic cultures, as was the case with Harappan culture. Bullocks and horses were used for dragging the cart and as beasts of burden.

Agni is compared to the horse, both being called *akra*, *atya*, *aśva*, etc. (*atya* is derived from root *at* ‘to advance’ *asva* from the root *as* or *asin*: as to pervade). The words *akra* and *atya* went out of use later, although *asva* continued to be used. Perhaps this explains the use of the words *at* and *akra* in Indus seals for Agni and horse besides the more common word *asva*. The ass was the best favourite of burden and was not inauspicious as it was yoked to the chariot of the Asvins (RV I 34.9).

In the ritual of the horse sacrifice, the goat was sacrificed before the horse. The ram was also sacrificed and eaten. In one of the Indus seals, the sacrificial animal, a ram is shown standing behind a *hotr* or *yajamana*, who is making an offering to the fire God. In the lower register of the seal is a row of 7 holy men, *rishis*, symbolizing the *Saptarishi mandala*—the seven star group (*pleiades*—*krittika*). The castrated ram was called *petva* and the hornless one was known as *basta* (Dange, 1977:17). *Vajasaneyi Samhita* (XXX.11) mentions *hasṭipa* for the cemetery, *asvapa* for speed, *gopala* for nourishment and *avipala*

for strength. The elephant, horse, goat and cow were all taken care of by the respective protectors. There is a reference to *asvapa* in an Indus seal inscription. Another word for *hasti* (elephant) was *ibha*.

The habitat of the elephant is said to be the Himalayas (*Vaj. Sam.* XXIV. 30). Camel and elephant were well known to the Vedic people and so also to the Harappans. The elephant is said to be wild (*mrga*) but the office of the *hastipa* suggests that the beast was tamed and protected. Elephant tusk was used for making ivory combs, gamesmen and seals in Indus civilization. In the Acropolis at Lothal, there is an ivory workshop, and a seal made of ivory was found during excavations. It is observed that the words *kimpurusha* and *vrshakapi* and the identification of this beast with the man shows that the beast thus caught must have been very large and similar to the *yati*, famous in modern times. The hawk was known as *syena* and *suparna*, the destroyer of snake poison.

AGRICULTURE PRODUCE IN THE INDUS CIVILIZATION

PRE-HARAPPAN

(1) Neolithic Culture at Mehrgah (Period I: 4th–7th Millennium)

From the upper layers of this period, the findings include a sickle, a few grinding stones, cereal impressions of six-row barley (*H. Vulgare* and *H. Vulgare* var *Nudum*), two-row barley (*Hordeum distichum*), einkorn wheat (*Triticum monococcum*), emmer wheat (*T. dicoccum*) and bread wheat (*T. durum/aestivum*). Agriculture in Baluchistan was, thus, diversified (Jarrige and Lechevallier, 1979).

(2) Mehrgarh II

Among a series of agricultural settlements of 6000 BC on the Bolan River in Baluchistan, Mehrgarh has made a unique contribution to the history of agriculture. Seeds of cotton (*Gossypium*) in Mehrgarh Period II (5000 BC) are found in association with seeds of other cultivated plants near the granary. Apparently, cotton too must have been cultivated for its fibre or oil rich seeds. Other cultivated crops of the sixth millennium BC are emmer, einkorn and two-row barley. It is obvious that on the border of Indus civilization, the Neolithic Chalcolithic folk were successful agriculturists. They could also select superior cereals such as free-threshing wheat and six-row barley. The ancient wheat in Indus civilization, namely *T. sphaerococcum*, a hexaploid is even today basically adapted to northwestern India (V. Mittre, 1974:8).

This compact and short variety of wheat well adapted to field irrigation was present in Mehrgarh in 4000 BC. The fast aggradation of the surface resulted in burying the Neolithic deposit in 9 m thick alluvium. In fact, if the pre-Harappan habitation deposits in waterlogged area of Mohenjo-daro are carefully excavated, more remains of cultivated crop in the early fourth millennium BC may be found.

- 23 M.G.S. Narayanan, 'Companions of Honour', in *Aspects of Aryanisation in Kerala* (Trivandrum: 1973).
- 24 Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, chapter on 'Divisions of the Kingdom'.
- 25 Narayanan, *ibid.*; Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala*.
- 26 Kesavan Veluthat, *Political Structure of Early Medieval South India* (Delhi: 1993), p. 176
- 27 *TAS.*, (vol. III), pp. 131–207.
- 28 Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala*, chapter on 'Organisation and Administration'.
- 29 Kesavan Veluthat, 'The *Sabha* and *Parishad* in Medieval South India: Correlation of Epigraphic and *Dharmasastraic* Evidence', *Tamil Civilization*, vol. III, nos. 2, 3, 1985, pp. 75–82.
- 30 Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, pp. 106–9, 171–3, 186–7; *idem*, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala* (Trivandrum: 1972).
- 31 *TAS*, vol. II, no. 9, pp. i, ii.
- 32 Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, 'Introduction'.
- 33 The Tiruvalla Copper Plates refer to a large number of such donations.
- 34 There are many cases where a military representative of the *perumāḷ* presided over, or was at least present in, the meetings of the *sabhā*: Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala*, chapter on 'Organisation and Administration'.
- 35 The Syrian Christian Copper Plates refer to different artisanal groups.
- 36 Several examples of such transfer are available in the Tiruvalla copperplates: *TAS*, vol. V, no. 1, pp. 63–85.
- 37 C.H. Jayasree, 'Slavery and Serfdom in Malabar', Ph.D. thesis, Mangalore University, Mangalore, 1994.
- 38 For an analysis of the contemporary situation in the Chola country, see Kesavan Veluthat, 'Labour Rent and Produce Rent: Reflections on the Nature of Revenue under the Colas', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Dharwad, 1987.
- 39 The story of the Shaiva saint Nantanar, who was a *paṛaiya* by caste, as contained in the *Periyapurāṇam*, tells us how miserable the plight of the hamlets of *paṛaiyas* were: *Periyapurāṇam*, *Tirunāḷaiṇṇ-pōvār Purāṇam*, verses 2–9.
- 40 For the percolation of *jāti* and other details of social stratification, Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, chapter on 'Social System'.
- 41 For details of trade, *ibid.*, pp. 171–3.
- 42 For a study of the Bhakti movement, M.G.S.Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthat, 'The Bhakti Movement in South India', S.C. Malik (ed.), *Indian Movements: Some Aspects of Dissent, Protest and Reform* (Simla: 1978), reproduced in D.N.Jha (ed.), *The Feudal Order* (Delhi: 2000).
- 43 *TAS*, vol. II, no. 9, pp. i, ii.
- 44 C.P.T. Winkworth, 'Notes on the Pahlavi Signatures to Quilon-Plates', with notes by T.K. Joseph and F.C.Burkitt, *Kerala Society Papers*, vol. I, series 6, pp. 320–23.
- 45 M.R. Raghava Varier, 'Further Expansion of Agrarian Society: B. Socio-Economic Structure', in Cheriyan (ed.), *Perspectives on Kerala History*, pp. 79–122.
- 46 For a discussion of the legend and its various possibilities, Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, pp. 64–70.
- 47 Veluthat, 'Further Expansion of Agrarian Society', pp. 62–3.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- 49 No comprehensive study of the history of Cochin in the period between AD 1100 and 1500 is available. Conventional accounts contained in C. Achyutha Menon, *Cochin State Manual* (Ernakulam: 1911) and K.P. Padmanabha Menon, *Kocchirajyacaritam* (2 vols) (Trichur: 1912 and 1914) are inadequate.
- 50 For the antecedents of Venad, see Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, pp. 102–5.
- 51 P.L. Chackoḥan, 'Historical and Cultural Geography of Venatu, Travancore, c. AD 1124 to 1729', Ph.D. thesis, Deccan College, Pune, 1980; K.N.Ganesh, 'Agrarian Expansion and Consolidation in Venatu in the Post-Cēra Period', Ph.D. thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1986.
- 52 Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, pp. 68, 96–7; V.V. Haridas, 'The Emergence of a Medieval South Indian Kingdom: Calicut under the Zamorins', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, LIX Session (Patiala: 1998).
- 53 Aiyar, *Zamorins of Calicut*, pp. 60–62.
- 54 *Ibid.*, pp. 87–8.
- 55 *Ibid.*, pp. 93–7.
- 56 *Ibid.*, pp. 91–120.
- 57 Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, pp. 91–4.
- 58 C. Girija, 'The Mushikavamsakavya: A Study', M.Phil. dissertation, Mangalore University, Mangalore, 1990.

- 59 An inscription from the Kovur temple, Kannur district, deciphered by M.G.S. Narayanan and the present writer, speaks of *Kōlattāyiravar* (the 'Thousand of Kolam'). Inscriptions from South Canara make references to *Kōlabāḷi Sāsiravarū*, again, the 'Thousand of Kolam': K.V. Ramesh, *A History of South Canara* (Dharwad: 1970), pp. 251, 262.
- 60 There is considerable new discussion on the svarūpam in recent years. For a most recent analysis, M.R. Raghava Varier, 'Svarupam as a Political Unit in Medieval Kerala', A paper presented to a seminar on State and Society in Pre-modern South India, Government College, Trichur, February 2000.
- 61 A. Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History* (Kottayam: 1971).
- 62 Narayanan (ed.), *Vanjeri Granthavari* (Calicut: Calicut University, 1987). For the developments in a Brahman settlement leading to its transformation into a *saṅkētam*, see Kesavan Veluthat, 'The Temple and the State', paper presented to the seminar on State and Society in Pre-modern South India, Government College, Trichur, February 2000.
- 63 Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala*, pp. 88–95.
- 64 For epigraphic reference, *EI* (vol. IV), pp. 290–9. For references to literature, Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala*, pp. 72–5 and nn. 30, 31. See also Aiyar, *Zamorins of Calicut*, pp. 97–102.
- 65 M.R. Raghava Varier, 'Further Expansion of Agrarian society', in Varier (ed.), *Perspectives on Kerala History*, pp. 94–5.
- 66 *Ibid.*, pp. 84–91.
- 67 *Ibid.*, pp. 100–118.
- 68 M.R. Raghava Varier, 'Perigrinations of Folk Deities and the Making of a Sacred Geography', paper presented to a seminar on Sacred Geography in Honour of Professor R. Champakalakshmi, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, November 1997.
- 69 Varier, 'Further Expansion of Agrarian Society', pp. 100–18.
- 70 *Ibid.*, pp. 99–103; Hanumanayaka, 'Malayali Merchants in Medieval Karnataka', paper presented at the LX Session of the Indian History Congress, Calicut, 1999.
- 71 Narayanan, *Perumāls of Kerala*, pp. 64–70.
- 72 M. Gangadharan, 'Is there a Portuguese Period in Kerala History?' *Samvada*, (souvenir of the International Conference on Europe and South Asia) (New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences, 1998). The debate has a long pedigree, dating from Sardar K.M.Panikkar's famous pronouncements on the 'da Gama Epoch'. For some refreshing discussion, C.J. van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society* (Bandung: 1960); Neils Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution of the Seventeenth Century: The East India Companies and the Decline of Caravan Trade* (Chicago: 1975). For a note of dissent, K.S.Mathew, 'Trade and Commerce', in Varier, *Perspectives on Kerala History*, pp. 181–227.
- 73 Kesavan Veluthat, 'Community and Religious Identity', *Communalism Combat* (special millennium issue), vol. 7, no. 54, 1999, pp. 54–6. For details of the way in which Christians in Kerala were identified as a jāti comprehensively. Scaria Zacharia (ed.), *The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper* (Edamattam: 1994), pp. 7–59. The bibliography given in the book is extremely valuable.
- 74 *Ibid.*, p. 42. Zacharia translates it as 'Law of Thomas'.
- 75 Quoted, K.J. John, *The Road to Diamper* (Cochin: 1999), p. 130.
- 76 Zacharia, *Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper*, p. 17.
- 77 Muhammed Hussain Nainar (ed.), *Tuhfat ul-Mujahidin* (Madras: 1946).
- 78 T.I. Poonen, *The Dutch Hegemony in Malabar and Its Collapse* (Trivandrum: 1978); M.O.Koshy, *The Dutch Power in Kerala (1729–1758)* (New Delhi: 1989).
- 79 K.K.N. Kurup, *History of the Tellicherry Factory* (Calicut: Calicut University, 1981).
- 80 M.R. Raghava Varier, *Vattakkan Pattukalute Paniyala* (Sukapuram: 1980).
- 81 For a recent analysis from the Dutch perspective, Mark de Lannoy, *The Kulasekhara Perumāls of Travancore: History and State Formation in Travancore from 1671 to 1758* (Leiden: 1997).
- 82 A.P. Ibrahim Kunju, *Marthanda Varma and His Times* (Trivandrum: 1975); Koshy, *Dutch Power in Kerala*.
- 83 The figure Śaktan Tampurān, though very much historical, has become legendary in the folklore of Kerala. For details of his rule, see Menon, *Cochin State Manual*, pp. 159–77.
- 84 For a picture of the fragmented political condition of the northern parts of Kerala, William Logan (ed.), *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Other Papers of Importance Relating to British affairs in Malabar: Malabar Manual* (vol. III) (Trivandrum: 1998 [reprint]).
- 85 K.N. Chitnis, *Keladi Polity* (Dharwar: 1974).
- 86 For details of the Ikkeri forts in the Kasargod district, A. Sreehara Menon, *Kerala State Gazetteers: Kannur District* (Trivandrum: 1968).

87 I owe this information to Dr M.R. Raghava Varier.

88 N.M. Nampoothiri, *Vellayute Caritram* (Sukapuram: 1998). This is an account of a Nambudiri Brahman in the form of some sort of a diary who gives details about Haider's raids. He records an interview he had with the *nabhāvu* (nawab).

89 Memories of Tipu's raids are not exactly sweet. For a representation, A.R. Rajarajavarma, *Āṅgalasāmrājya* (Trivandrum: 1997 [reprint]), pp. 295–415. This is an interesting historical kāvya written in Sanskrit in the early twentieth century. The poet is influenced through and through by the dominant historiographical tradition. Perhaps that explains his harsh judgement of the sultan.

CHAPTER 15

The Chola State and Society

Y. Subbarayalu

I

There is no reliable information to trace the antecedents of the Chola (pronounced as Chōla) dynasty that established its rule in the Kaveri (Thanjavur) delta about AD 850. This is rather amazing as there are available for this dynastic period copious epigraphical sources (nearly 10,000 inscriptions) besides a fair amount of court and religious literature.¹ It seems to have been just one of the many chiefly families that dotted the Tamil country until the ninth century under the aegis of the Pallava rule. Claiming descent from the Chola line mentioned in the earliest Tamil literature six to ten centuries earlier, the Cholas became a powerful ruling dynasty with the exit of the Pallavas who had been ruling the northern districts of Tamil Nadu till then. Very soon after this they acquired a mythical genealogy to connect them with the Puranic traditions of north India.² In keeping with this claim, they vigorously encouraged Brahmanical settlements and canonized temples, mostly Shaivite, of a pan-Indian character.³ During the four centuries (c.850–1279) of its almost continuous existence the Chola state was ruled over by twenty kings, excluding a few other members who were just co-rulers. But for two or three minor breaks the line had a continuous and stable existence.

Traditionally, the territory of the Chola lineage had been called Chōla-nāḍu confined to the Kaveri delta from Tiruchirappalli on the west to the sea on the east. And it continued to be the most fertile and stable part of the state's territory to the end of its existence, whereas areas outside its limits were added to and lost in the intervening years. For a major part of its existence, however, the Chola state had sovereign rights over Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam, covering the northern part of Tamil Nadu. Only during the eleventh century were the southern part of Tamil Nadu, that is, the Pandya country proper, and the southern districts of Karnataka under its direct control. The territories beyond, such as the Andhra districts up to the Krishna and northern Karnataka and Kerala, never became integral parts of the Chola kingdom. They were just tributary territories.

Within a few decades of its rise, the Chola kingdom came to include Toṇḍai-nāḍu, the central part of the Pallava territory in northern Tamil Nadu. But at the height of its triumph

about the middle of the tenth century, the kingdom fell a prey to the onslaughts of the Rashtrakuta king, a powerful neighbour on its north-west, and was temporarily crippled. After its restoration two decades later, the Cholas faced no formidable rivals in its expansion up to the south of the Krishna river. Thereafter, throughout the eleventh century, wars became an organized affair. The arena of war covered a vast area from the Krishna to Cape Kanyakumari and even beyond the seas.

During the ninth and tenth centuries the Chola king was not the sole ruler of the country. There were a number of chiefs of small, ancient lineages maintaining some sort of subordinate relationship with the monarch. These territories carried the chiefs' family names, like Vāṇakō-pāḍi and Maḷa-nāḍu. Some of them ruled over small areas comprising a cluster of settlements. But some had somewhat bigger areas extending over two or more modern taluks. The chiefly families had matrimonial relations amongst themselves and provided prospective queens to the Chola royal family. For all practical purposes, the chiefs were masters in their respective localities. They had their little courts, officers, and army. They enjoyed fiscal powers and patronized temples with large money and land gifts. They were subordinate to the Chola king in the sense that they acknowledged his overlordship by referring to his reign in their own records and by executing orders, if any, received from him. During wars they sent their armies to assist the Chola overlord and some of them personally played a leading role in the battlefield as commanders.

However, eleventh-century inscriptions very rarely refer to the activities of chiefs. This is the century of imperial expansion initiated by Rājarāja I (985–1014) who was both a great warrior and statesman. Very ingeniously, he incorporated all the chiefly territories in his new territorial (*vaḷanāḍu*) scheme. The chiefs who were deprived of their territories seem to have been recruited to the bureaucracy elaborated by the king. Also, a country-wide land survey was for the first time undertaken in his reign. Rājēndra I (1012–44) advanced his father's imperial designs further by carrying arms across the seas. Administratively speaking, his reign is noted for the establishment of viceroyalties in the conquered territories, namely, the Ganga country in southern Karnataka, the Pandya country in southern Tamil Nadu, and Sri Lanka under the charge of his sons. The period covering the reigns of Rājēndra I and his three sons (1012–70) seems to have been a crucial time in the restructuring of society. The emergence of the dual social divisions called Right Hand and Left Hand should be attributed to the many wars of this phase, politicizing many erstwhile warrior and pastoral tribes that had remained outside the plains' society till then.

Kulottunga I (1070–1120), in spite of his great martial and administrative capabilities, could not arrest the shrinkage of his overlordly influence outside the central area. This happened due to an equally great warrior-king occupying the western Chalukya throne on the north-west and due to the assertive Pandya king on the south. The Chola-Pandya viceroyalty is not heard of after 1070. But Kulottunga tried to control the Pandya area by stationing garrisons on important highways there and also by putting the outer maṇḍalams under some non-royal governor called *maṇḍala-mudali*. Hereafter, the Chola state covered only the areas of Chōḷa-maṇḍalam and Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam. Even within this area, local chiefs started to gain the upper hand. Some of these chiefs, as their names and territories indicate, claimed descent from some previous lines that had existed before AD 1000. Others were obviously from new lines. They were found almost everywhere except in the core area comprising the Thanjavur district and a portion of Tiruchirapalli district.⁴

The common point relating to all these local chiefs is that they were generally in charge of the watchmanship of their respective localities, ranging from one village to

several *nāḍus*.⁵ For discharging that duty they got sizeable revenue by way of the major tax called *pāḍikāval* levied on land produce and some minor levies on local artisans. From the nonchalant way they disposed of the revenue from these taxes, it may be said that the chiefs were virtually independent rulers of their localities, which they called their territory (*nāḍu*), and royal orders seldom penetrated the borders of these chiefly domains.⁶ There is some evidence to suggest that most of these later-day chiefs started as warriors, playing a major role in the Chola army of the eleventh century. Actually, most of them, and their once martial clans, became part of the settled communities only during the eleventh century, and later. The prominent warriors were encouraged, it seems, by the Chola king, to become the watchmen of their localities and were given considerable fiscal rights in the areas under their jurisdiction. There were occasions when the bigger and powerful chiefs aggrandized themselves at the cost of the smaller chiefs. Attempts were made to avert such conflicts by political compacts that affirmed respect and loyalty towards each other and assured the continuation of the status quo.

By the later half of the twelfth century, the Chola king had come to depend more and more on the armies of the chiefs. Positioned on the borders, the chiefs were vacillating and equivocal in their loyalties between the Chola overlord and his neighbours. This became quite apparent when the Pandya king again became powerful so as to challenge Chola supremacy in the early decades of the thirteenth century. By the middle of that century the Chola rule was confined to the central parts due to the emergence of powerful and independent chiefs like the Kāḍava, the Bāṇa, and Telugu Chola. Not only this, there cropped up the overbearing influence of the Hoysalas of Karnataka who came first to assist the Chola king when the latter was taken captive by the Kāḍava chief around 1230. Within a few decades the Hoysalas established their own parallel rule in the Tiruchirappalli area. The last Chola king, Rājendra III, could retain only the Kaveri delta under his nominal rule, which ended with his death in 1279.

II

With the expansion of the Chola state some structural change took place in its territory.⁷ In the reign of Rājarāja I a clear attempt was made to reorganize the territory so as to fully incorporate the erstwhile chiefly territories within the territory of the growing state. Rājarāja I renamed all the conquered territories after his own titles. The small chiefly territories were given new names that had the suffix element '*vaḷanāḍu*', for example, Maḷa-nāḍu alias Rajasraya-vaḷanāḍu.⁸ If we consider that the renaming coincided with the disappearance of the chiefs, the introduction of the *vaḷanāḍu* nomenclature was a clever idea of Rājarāja I to consolidate conquered territories. This new set-up was introduced in the conquered Pandya territory in the reign of his son Rājendra I, and later this was extended to Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam and southern Karnataka.

Another innovation of Rājarāja I for integrating the territories was the concept of 'maṇḍalam'. The traditional politico-geographical names of large territories were replaced by new names taken again from Rājarāja's many titles. Thus, Pandi-nāḍu, the Pandya country, was called Rājarāja-maṇḍalam, and Toṇḍai-nāḍu was called Jayangoṇḍa-chōḷa-maṇḍalam (same as Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam). And Chōḷa-nāḍu itself was called Chōḷa-maṇḍalam. These maṇḍalams were not just new names; rather, they incorporated the adjoining chiefly territories besides, of course, their core territory. For example, Chōḷa-maṇḍalam included the Chōḷa-nāḍu (the core territory) and the adjoining Maḷa-nāḍu, Ko-nāḍu, Irungola-paḍi, etc.

Thus, the introduction of the maṇḍala nomenclature entailed significant reorganization of the entire territory.

A seemingly stable feature of the Chola administrative units was the nāḍu, which was the basic territorial unit in a major part of south India at this time. Though the term 'nāḍu' was also used in its general sense to denote the larger political territories (like Chōḷa-nāḍu), it was more specifically used to denote distinct agricultural micro-regions. Unlike vaḷanāḍu and maṇḍalam, very few nāḍu names show royal imprint in the Chola country. To judge from the meagre evidence before the Chola times, it is clear that at least some of the nāḍus of the Chola times had a high antiquity. The nuclei of some other nāḍus also might have been formed long before the Chola rule. An analysis of their names, topography, and other particulars suggests that the nāḍu was basically a cluster or grouping of peasant settlements formed about the nucleus of a common irrigation source like a channel or tank and strengthened perhaps by kinship ties in the initial stages.⁹ It is found that there were nearly 400 nāḍus in the Chōḷa and Toṇḍai maṇḍalams taken together. Except a few extreme cases, the nāḍus generally ranged in extent between 20 and 100 sq. km. It seems that in the drier localities the area of the nāḍu was larger than that in the fertile ones. Nāḍus in fertile tracts, however, had denser settlements, whereas those in the dry tracts had fewer settlements.

Superimposed on the pre-existing nāḍus, the vaḷanāḍu set-up disturbed their territorial integrity to some extent. Being a deliberate royal contrivance, the vaḷanāḍus took for their boundaries, wherever possible, some prominent water channel. So, while a nāḍu lay on both the banks of such watercourses, a vaḷanāḍu lay on only one bank. Consequently, many a nāḍu in the channel-rich delta area came to be partitioned among two different, adjoining vaḷanāḍus, and this certainly disturbed the original integrity of the nāḍus.

The basic settlement comprising the habitation site and the surrounding agricultural lands was called ūr. The most common and undifferentiated type of village was called *vellānvagai*, literally the 'agricultural kind', subject to customary taxes and enjoying customary rights and privileges. In several of these villages there were separate *cheri* or quarters for the paraiya (the caste of agricultural labour), and in some separate quarters for artisans (*kaṇmālā*) and for toddy-tappers (*īlava*) also.¹⁰ Unlike the vellānvagai villages, the eleemosynary villages, on their creation, were distinguished by the conferment of special names as well as special privileges. Thus, the brahmadeya, that is, the village granted to Brahmans with full or partial exemption of taxes, was given a new name consisting of two components, the first one being a title or name of the donor (usually a king or queen) and the second being 'chaturvedimangalam', for example, Rājarāja-chaturvedimangalam. The temple village was called devadana (that is, *devasthana*). The settlement, which was primarily mercantile, was called *nagaram*. The villages of the eleemosynary type, particularly the Brahman villages on their creation, became to a large extent independent of the nāḍu of which they had been a part earlier. Some Brahman villages even attained a fully independent status, denoted by the term *taniyūr*, meaning independent village. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries there were a number of prominent taniyūrs. Generally the Brahman villages had attached to them many hamlets that were inhabited by the tenant cultivators, called *perilamai*, of the Brahman landholders. In the case of some taniyūrs in Chōḷa-maṇḍalam, a large number of their hamlets were grouped to form new nāḍus. These new nāḍus were named after kings with the distinguishing suffix component *pēriḷamai-nāḍu* (for example, Kiḍāraṅgoṇḍa-chōḷa-pēriḷamai-nāḍu)¹¹ to differentiate them from the traditional nāḍus.

It is now generally accepted that most of the Brahman villages in Tamil Nadu, particularly those of the Chōḷa-maṇḍalam, had become well established by the tenth century, mostly due to the interest shown by the Pallava and Pandya rulers who preceded the Cholas,

if we go by their names.¹² The Chola dynasty added some new ones in the early half of its rule, but it seems to have mostly elaborated the already existing ones. Of course, there were a few new gigantic ventures, like the one created by Rājendra I through his Karandai grant around 1,020 in favour of 1,080 Brahman families. These Brahmans were invited from more than 100 old settlements spread over Tamil Nadu, a majority, however, coming from the old Brahman settlements within the Chōḷa-maṇḍalam.¹³ The creation of the brahmadeya, while entailing reorganization of the existing local irrigation network (like the criss-cross pattern of feeder and drainage canals), also helped in making new canals to bring fallow land under cultivation to support the large immigrant population. For the maintenance of irrigation works, separate lands were provided in each village under the name *vettappēru* (tenure for the *veṭṭi*).¹⁴ References to such *vettappēru* lands are found more frequently in pre-eleventh-century inscriptions both in Brahman and non-Brahman villages. This would imply that by the tenth century the irrigation system in the Kaveri delta had become stabilized and thereafter only the maintenance of the system was the major concern of the various village communities.¹⁵ No new major irrigation works are referred to in the eleventh century and after.

III

In the Chola state the king was the central figure in all respects. As the status of the king gradually rose from that of an ordinary chief in the ninth century to the position of an emperor in the eleventh, the use of grandiose titles became frequent. Whenever his subjects referred to the king in the earlier decades they used the designation *perumān*, meaning 'great son'. From the middle of the tenth century the social distance between the king and his subjects began to increase, as may be observed from the many attributes given to the king. The first such term is the designation *uḍaiyār* meaning 'our possessor' or 'our lord'. After 1100 this form was elaborated into 'the lord of the world'. The title *chakravartti* (emperor) came into use around 1100, followed a little later by the more grandiloquent *tribhuvana-chakravartti* (emperor of the three worlds). An interesting feature of the titles used for the kings is that many of them had striking parallels in the titles used for contemporary deities. Some kings even claimed to be the comrades (*tōlan*) of some famous deities.¹⁶ The numerous titles of the king, partly in Tamil and partly in Sanskrit, were sometimes given as names to temple jewels, to fields and places, to large territories, and, above all, they were prefixed to the titles of important persons and officials. The king was the fountain of honour, always.

The Chola kings were all polygamous. The early kings kept concubines also without any inhibitions. Some of the early queens came from humble families and some were originally *dēvadāsis*. From the beginning, taking wives from chiefly families was very common. These alliances must have been of high consideration for the consolidation of Chola rule in the early stages. Succession to the throne was by primogeniture. Deviation from this norm and succession disputes were rare. The coronation ceremony (*abhisheka*) was celebrated by Brahmanic rituals. The coronation ceremony must have been the most important occasion for the creation of several royal titles, which were profusely showered upon the new king, mostly by Brahman scholars.

The image of the king was systematically enhanced through panegyrics put on temple walls. In the eulogy section of Rajaraja I's inscriptions, the king's achievements alone were praised. In the succeeding reigns the entire royal family was given encomiums, but there

too the king towers above all. The king's possession of the entire earth and his heroic feats (personified as goddesses of earth and victory respectively) were stressed in the first part of the eulogies and brute force was graciously acknowledged. Sanskrit eulogies prefixed to copperplates followed the somewhat ancient Brahmanic tradition. Their aim was to praise the entire Chola line, claiming puranic antiquity for the line and tracing its origin from the sun.

The king was the supreme head of the government, and the top executive orders always issued from him. That order was called *aru-ārai* (the sacred command), to act against which was a sacrilege to be attended by severe punishment. Inscriptions that narrate in detail the passage of royal orders for executive action do not supply us any clear idea about his court except the fact that the king was generally surrounded by a number of officers.¹⁷ Though there were several groups of officials, their putative functions can be ascertained only indirectly, either from the names of offices or, to some extent, from the actual duties they performed. There is some clear evidence that royal orders passed on through several officials, starting from the *adhikāri* at the top and ending with the local accountant, or sometimes even a soldier.¹⁸

To start with, there were only a few offices in the first century of the Chola rule. Later, the old offices were elaborated and new ones were added, particularly in the field of revenue assessment and collection, and also in military establishment. *Tirumandira-ōlai* or just *ōlai* was the royal scribe, personal secretary, so to say, who committed to writing the oral orders of the king on the spot. This office continued to exist throughout the Chola rule. There were some superior officers in the king's secretariat who scrutinized his jottings before passing on the same for execution. The senior executive officers were called the *adhikāri*. Their number was small in the beginning, but increased manifold in the eleventh century, the century of imperial expansion. The office called *naḍuvirukkai*, which may have been judicial in nature, is always found mentioned along with the *adhikāri* in royal records, and the holders of this office were all *brāhmas*, that is, learned Brahmans. This office was confined to only the imperial phase. The *sēnāpati*, the topmost military office, existed only in the imperial phase, that is, during the eleventh century. Brahmans were proportionately large in this office and *mūvēndavēḷān* was conspicuously absent. The second-ranking military office was *daṇḍanāyagam*. The land revenue department (*puravuvāri-tiṇaikkaḷam*, later *puravuvāri-srikaraṇam*) took shape in the late tenth century and continued to the end. Being just a small and simple office in the beginning, it became elaborate and was subdivided into some hierarchical sections in the course of time.

Below the revenue officers were the locality (*nāḍu*-level) officers called the *nāḍu-vagai*, 'one who makes (tax) settlements of the *nāḍu*'. This office, however, seems to have disappeared in the second half of the period. The *śrikāriyam*, the office concerned with the supervision of the temple administration, existed almost throughout the Chola rule. Some of the *śrikāriyam* officers held this office only for particular occasions, besides their other regular office like *adhikāri* and *sēnāpati*. But many of them were permanent holders, having their residence near the particular temple.

Even a superficial observation of the contextual positions of all the above offices reveals the existence of a sort of hierarchy among them. This impression is corroborated by the evidence relating to the vertical mobility of the different office-holders. All officers, big and small, were only the king's servants doing his business (*rāja kāriyam*). There was a positive correlation between offices and titles. That is, a high office came with a high-sounding title, usually prefixing a king's title. The implication is that the title was conferred on the officer by the king, the bestower of honour. The titles of one and the same officer used to change with the accession of a new king.

IV

The Chola period was marked throughout by constant and endemic warfare. From the names of the army regiments referred to now and then we may draw some inferences about the mode of recruitment and the weaponry of a particular unit. In the first half the *kaikkola* regiments were prominent. They continued to exist in the later half also, but not so prominently. Each being named after the title of the ruling king, these regiments were called 'select' units as indicated by the verbal adjective *terinda*, for example, Parantaka-terinda-kaikkolar, 'the select kaikkolas called Parantaka'. Another name that figures prominently in the Chola army was the *velaikkara* regiments. There are two diametrically opposite views regarding the character of the *velaikkara* units: one, that they were mercenary troops recruited for the occasion (*velai*); and two, that they were 'the most permanent and dependable troops in the royal service—ever ready to defend the king and his cause, sacrificing their lives when occasion (*velai*) arose'. For the mercenary character the Polonnaruwa Tamil inscription of the Sri Lanka king Vijayabahu dated 1110 is usually cited.¹⁹ According to this inscription, the *velaikkara* army included a number of subsections, like *valangai*, *idangai*, and *charutanam*, which seem to be modelled on the Chola army and recruited from the Tamil country. It has also been suggested that the big mercantile bodies like the *valanjiyar* may have supplied the recruits of this army to Sri Lankan princes.²⁰ But this does not support the view that the Chola army units were also mercenary in character as the Chola army preceded the Sri Lankan one. The presence of so many 'select' *velaikkara* regiments would actually support the second view. Indeed, we have evidence from the twelfth- and early-thirteenth-century inscriptions for the chivalrous tradition of the *velaikkara* soldiers who pledged their very lives for the safety of their masters.²¹

Among the other units, mention may be made of the *parivāratattār*, which consisted of guardsmen attached to the palace. A regiment called *vīra-chōla-aṇukkar* seems to have been connected with the protection of temples. A few regiments were recruited from the neighbouring non-Tamil regions (Kannāḍa and Malayālam) as may be seen from their designations—*Kannāḍaka-kaduttalai* (Strong Heads of Kannāḍaka), *Malaiyan-orraichchēvagar* (Malayāla Infantry). Among the infantry that formed a large chunk of the Chola army were found archers, sword-bearers, and spearsmen. Next to the infantry were the cavalry and elephantry. Chariots were not significant. About the navy little is known, even though naval expeditions are mentioned very frequently in the eleventh century. Each regiment had a captain called *nāyagam* in the beginning and later on *paḍai-mudali*. Above the captains were the *daṇḍanāyagam* (commander) and the *sēnāpati* (commander-in-chief).

One reason for attributing mercenary character to the Chola army is the non-availability of direct evidence as to the mode of its recruitment and maintenance. It seems that at least some regiments were stationed near big temples and were attached to them. For their maintenance, they were assigned lands called *vīrabhōga* (warrior's enjoyment) and *paḍai-parru* (military holding). Of course, there were cantonments (*paḍai-vīḍu*) in the capital cities. Perhaps there were cantonments elsewhere also with such names as *kadagam* or *parigraham*. Stationing military outposts (*nilai-paḍai*) in conquered territories is heard of only in the reign of Kulottunga I (1070–1120).

Evidence of a royal army is explicitly found only up to the early twelfth century. In its heyday, during the eleventh century, the Chola army was a huge body. A Chalukya inscription of 1007 refers to the invading Chola army as consisting of 900,000 troops.²² Though the figure might be exaggerated, it conveys the real magnitude of the Chola army at that time. In the beginning the armies of the local chiefs assisted the king's army. This trend

seems to have reappeared in the second half along with the emergence of local (pāḍikāval) chiefs in most of the outlying areas, and thereafter the king's army was to be at the mercy of these chiefs.

V

An inventory of the tax terms in the Chola inscriptions gives the impression that the taxes of the state were incomprehensibly numerous. However, recent systematic analyses of these (400-odd) have shown that only a few of them were widely prevalent, others being mostly local and occasional in nature. On a contextual analysis of the tax terms, the significant taxes can be categorized as follows:²³ *kaḍamai*; *kuḍimai*; taxes on artisans and merchants; and miscellaneous taxes. This grouping takes into account both the frequency of the terms and the levels of the tax-payers. *Kaḍamai*, the major land tax, was occasionally denoted by some other synonymous terms like *puravu*, *irai*, *kāṇik-kaḍan*, *mēl-vāram*, and *opādi* (Sanskrit *upādhi*). *Kuḍimai* comprised a bundle of labour levies or corvee, denoted by various terms such as *veṭṭi* (Sanskrit *viṣṭi*), *amanji*, *muṭṭai-āl*, and *vēṭinai* (Sanskrit *vētana*). To this group may be added the levy *echchōru*, 'day meals'; it seems to have been the obligation to provide meals to public servants on tour (and perhaps to the corvee labour also). *Kuḍimai* as a general and comprehensive term for corvee is found prominently in the second half when the other terms are used only occasionally. The third group, denoted by the suffixing terms *pāṭṭam* and *āyam*, included mostly cash levies imposed on artisans (goldsmiths, weavers, oil-pressers) and merchants. This group of taxes became prominent only in the second half. The term *antarāyam* seems to have been a comprehensive term to denote this group as a whole, and sometimes there is overlapping between this term and *kuḍimai*. Under the fourth group are included the watchmanship dues called *pāḍikāval*, fines, other occasional fees, and presents. The watchmanship tax is found only in the second half.

The major land tax was paid by the *kāṇiyālar* or landholders directly to the government. This was the normal practice whether the landholder cultivated his lands himself or leased them out to some tenant-cultivators. The rent paid by the tenant-cultivators to their landlords was also denoted by the terms *kaḍamai* and *mēl-vāram*. It is, however, not a problem to distinguish between tax and rent in most contexts. As for the *kuḍimai*, it was always borne directly by the cultivators (*ulu-kuḍi*).²⁴ And it seems that a considerable part of this burden was passed on to the shoulders of the slave labourers (*āl* or *aḍimai*) toiling for the cultivators. The *kuḍimai* was not only levied by the king's government, but also by the local community (including temples), and, wherever they existed, by the *pāḍikāval* chiefs. The artisans were also subject to the levy of *kuḍimai*. The *pāḍikāval* due was also paid by the landholder as a fraction of the *kaḍamai*. Artisans and merchants also had to contribute some portion of tax dues towards the *pāḍikāval*. Fines were collected by the government, local bodies, temples, and *pāḍikāval* chiefs.

Assessment of land tax was made after a systematic land survey. Initially there prevailed a variety of measuring rods, but during the imperial phase there were attempts at some standardization in land measurements. There also prevailed the practice of computing lands of different categories to a notional or theoretical standard land called *maḍakku*. Though we do not have sufficient details about how the standard land was determined, factors like whether an area of land was irrigated by river or tank, whether it produced one or two crops a year, and the productive capacity of the land must have been taken into account.²⁵ At times, however, the determination of the 'standard' land seems to have

become quite arbitrary. The land tax was generally paid in kind in case of wetlands and in money in case of land under dry crops or those under commercial crops like arecanut and aromatic plants. It seems that in the outlying areas, Tonḍai-maṇḍalam or southern Karnataka, tax on wetlands also was computed in money during the second half. The available data has very little to say on the actual gross produce of lands. It is therefore very difficult to estimate the proportion of land tax to the actual produce. At present there could be no better estimate than that of K.A. Nilakanta Sastri who suggested 'something like a third of the gross produce'.²⁶

The compulsory labour that the kuḍimai represented was mainly meant for the maintenance of irrigation works in the beginning of the Chola rule. This burden on the cultivators (uḷu-kuḍi) gradually increased during the four centuries of Chola rule. When the king became powerful, the corvee seems to have been requisitioned for the erection and maintenance of palaces and temples also.²⁷ It became rather burdensome during the second half when the corvee obligation was commuted arbitrarily into money payments and was demanded by several authorities on various pretexts. From about the middle of the twelfth century the cultivators became agitated and a sort of confrontation developed between the cultivators and the landlords. There are several inscriptions in which we find the landlords (mostly Brahmans) trying to pacify their tenant-cultivators by giving them concessions in land rent and also in the volume of corvee.²⁸ Non-agricultural taxes, āyam and pāṭṭam, besides being confined to the last phase, were mostly levied in the areas under the pāḍikāval chiefs outside the Chōḷa-maṇḍalam. Therefore, the Chola government could not have been the main beneficiary of these taxes. Antarāyam, which overlapped with this group, was about 10 per cent of the main land tax over and above the latter.²⁹ For pāḍikāval, an inscription gives the rate as 5 *kalam* per vēli, which in the concerned area would be about 10 per cent of the land tax.³⁰ The pāḍikāval chiefs, however, could collect taxes on artisans and merchants too. There is definite evidence that there prevailed a sort of regular tax transfer from localities to the king's government. In the inscriptions relating to tax exemptions, in almost all of them, remissions were made or authorized by the king; in the few cases when such remissions were made by the corporate bodies such as sabhā or nāṭṭār, these bodies undertook to compensate the tax loss to the government.

The government was usually supposed to have lost its tax revenue from lands assigned to temples or other eleemosynary bodies as the land tax was transferred for the enjoyment of the donees (temples, sabhā, etc.). But this 'tax remission' seems in most cases to be only partial. That is, the so-called tax-free lands had to pay some portion of the original land dues to the government. In pre-Chola times, even in the first century of Chola rule, though rarely thereafter, this reduced or concessional rate was called *pancha-vāram* or one-fifth share. Strictly speaking, the *pancha-vāram* should be one-fifth of the full rate of land tax. But it seems to be an ideal rate, as usually it was more than one-fifth of the full rate. In the later half this concessional rate was denoted by the phrase *nichchayitta opādi*, 'the due that is fixed'. This new rate was a kind of arbitrary determination. It was about 60 per cent of the original and sometimes it could be as low as 40 per cent.³¹

VI

As regards the Chola government's role in the functioning of the local bodies, sometimes an officer sat, at the bidding of the king, in meetings of the Brahman sabhā. But this official presence did not go beyond emphasizing some Shastra-based solution to

problems referred to the government for resolution by the local elite themselves.³² At the village level the presence of the king's government was minimal. A village-level government official, called *ūr-ālvān*, meaning 'one who administers the village', is heard of only with reference to Brahman villages, and that too only in the first half. This may be due to the peculiar nature of the brahmadeya village, which required some special arrangement to administer it. The concerned official seems to have functioned mostly as a government tax collector.³³

For the general kind of villages we do not come across any official similar to the *ūr-ālvān* of the brahmadeya villages. Of course, there are a number of instances where the village bodies refer to certain officers to whom they had to pay taxes, like the *ūril-taṇḍinirān* (the collector of the village), *kōmurravar*, or *mudaligal* (the government officers collectively). These government officers were only temporary visitors to the villages, mainly for collecting taxes, not permanent village officers. The one regular village functionary who may be mistaken for a government officer was the village accountant called *ūr-kaṇakku* or *ūr-karaṇam*. The village accountant figured very often in the transactions of the village bodies, particularly where an authoritative description of some village land was involved. There is considerable explicit evidence to assert that the *ūr-kaṇakku* was a servant of the village bodies, not of the government. His designation, *madhyastha*, suggests that he was supposed to be a neutral person who was entrusted with preparing an unbiased account of the village lands. As one who kept record of the accounts of the landholdings and property rights inside the village, he must be considered as the most important executive link between the village and the government, especially when it came to the question of tax collection.

The king's government had no special establishment other than the army for policing the country. The local bodies seem to have had their own policing arrangement in the first phase. During the peak period of imperial expansion military presence was greatly felt even in remote parts of the country, from the *sēnāpati* at the top to the soldier at the bottom. We have instances where the military personnel were employed to collect tax arrears or even to punish a temple priest who had somehow incurred the displeasure of the queen.³⁴ During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries most of the outlying areas were put under the charge of local chiefs who provided the required protection, *pāḍikāval*, in lieu of some tax remuneration. Gradually the *pāḍikāval* arrangement became the only 'government' in many localities as the effectiveness of the Chola government decreased.

As there was no separate establishment for policing, there was no separate department for dispensing justice. The *dharmāsana* ('seat of justice') that occurs frequently in early inscriptions has been considered as the king's court of justice by Nilakanta Sastri.³⁵ This view seems to be incorrect. This term occurs only in the case of brahmadeya villages. Actually, an inscription of Uttaramallur, dated 994, clearly distinguishes *dharmāsana* from the 'king's gate' (*rājadvāra*),³⁶ and refers to fines (*daṇḍam*) that might be levied at the king's gate, at the *dharmāsana*, or at the *vari* (the revenue department). Most of the available cases of judicial proceedings of the Chola period are found to be communal or local in nature. That is, disputes were adjudicated by the communal, corporate bodies of the localities (the *nāṭṭar*, the 'Five Hundred', etc.) or caste assemblies. In the few instances where an executive punishment is mentioned the punishing authority was one of the high officials, like the *adhikāri*.

VII

The Chola state has been characterized variously by different scholars. The concept of a 'highly centralized state' put forward by Nilakanta Sastri, the pioneer historian of the Chola period, has been criticized in recent decades and in its place three different concepts have been put forward, namely, the feudal state, the segmentary state, and the early state.³⁷ Each of these new propositions has its own strong as well as weak points. As the duration of the Chola state covered nearly four centuries, it is not possible to apply the same concept with rigour throughout its existence. Let us rather summarize the salient features of the state over these four centuries. It need not be emphasized that the Chola state was a secondary state as it was successor to and influenced by the Pallava state, the earliest worth mentioning in this area. It grew from a tiny state in the ninth century to a remarkably large one in the course of the next two centuries or so. Its career falls into three phases: (a) pre-imperial (850–985); (b) imperial (986–1100); and (c) post-imperial (1100–1250). During the first phase of its existence it was a small kingdom claiming sovereign rights over a restricted territory. At this time wars were waged mainly to get tribute from vanquished rulers. No outside territory was annexed to the central area. Local bodies and communities enjoyed their traditional power without much government interference.

The imperial phase, inaugurated in the reign of Rajaraja I (985–1014), was marked by a powerful monarchy, growth of private property, and a well-stratified society. The ruling class comprised mostly the landed magnates of Vellāḷa and Brahman castes, and to some extent those of the previous chiefly lineages. The king of this phase was very different from his earlier counterparts. He was not only a great warrior but also a real administrator, assisted by an organized body of officials and the army. Attempts were made by the king at centralization of the political power. Territorial reorganization (like creation of *vaḷanāḍu* and *maṇḍalam*), creation of an elaborate bureaucracy, extensive land survey and detailed recording of land rights for revenue purposes, government control of temples and brahmadeyas, and mobilization of a big standing army for offensive and defensive purposes, and also for the maintenance of internal order, were the salient features of this process. Whether the state controlled the irrigation system, the very basis of the agricultural economy of the times, can only be inferred, as there is no direct evidence bearing on this. The irrigation network of the Kaveri delta had reached its optimum level by the tenth century. Thereafter its maintenance was the main concern of the government. Though local communities played a considerable role in the maintenance of these works, the corvee for these works, particularly the big canals, was always demanded in the name of the king.

Officials were actively mobile and not tied to their localities. This highly mobile bureaucracy as well as the army of the imperial phase certainly contributed to the complex agrarian system of the post-imperial phase of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The consequent growth of new landholding groups diminished proportionately the original high status and dominance of the Vellāḷa and Brahman in the ruling stratum. The other concomitant result of this situation was a fair degree of feudalization of land relations. The centralized power structure of the imperial phase, which was more dependent upon the ability of the ruling king, could not continue under the changed circumstances. There was obviously no imaginative revamping of the administration to cope with the new situation. Fragmentation of political authority with the emergence of various local chiefs and multiplicity of tax-collecting agencies imposed an enormous tax burden on the actual cultivators (*uḷu-kuḍi*). There developed, consequently, an agrarian crisis due to open confrontation

between the big landholders and cultivators. The ultimate demise of the Chola state has to be attributed more to this than any other factor.

VIII

The society of the Chola period was more or less stratified through a gradual process starting from a simple and undifferentiated society and ending up with a mature caste society in the course of four centuries. Many of the so-called castes started rather as occupational groups than kin groups. Another important feature to be stressed is that though the inferred stratification may apply as a broad outline to the entire period, the details changed over time. Caste-consciousness became pronounced and explicit only during the second half.³⁸ Many of the martial and pastoral communities that had been on the fringes of the plains' society until the tenth century began to be incorporated into the latter as new castes, such as the *paḷḷi*, *surutimān*, *nattamān*, and *śrīgōpāla*, in the eleventh century and after.

From an analysis of the caste composition of the donors that figure in inscriptions, it is found that the Brahman and Vellāḷa were the two top influential castes over the whole area and throughout the Chola rule. Actually, Brahmans enjoyed a better position in the first half than in the second. Next to these the *paḷḷi* is found prominently, but this caste appeared only in the eleventh century and it was confined later to the South Arcot district and adjoining areas. The herding (*maṇraḍi* and *iḍaiya*) and the merchant caste may be placed next, before the potters and other artisan castes. Kaikkōḷa, the future weaver caste, does not figure among the above groups. Kaikkōḷa at this juncture was just a designation of a prominent group of soldiers in the Chola army.³⁹ Brahmans occupied the first rank in the hierarchy due to their ritual superiority, added to their landed power. Wherever the jatis were ranked specifically, the Brahmans are found to be accorded the first place.⁴⁰ They were called *perun-kuḍi*, the 'greater *kuḍi* (householders)', whereas all others were just '*kuḍi*'. The Vellāḷa, which was the traditional agricultural community by virtue of its landed power, closely followed the Brahman, though numerically it was more powerful. The merchant caste was almost equal in rank to the Vellāḷa and it consisted of some sub-groups (distinguished by their special trade) like *sankarappāḍi*, *sāliya*, and *paṭṭinavar*. The merchant population was much less than that of the Vellāḷa, and they were confined only to the commercial settlements and a few big political centres like Thanjavur and Kanchipuram. The herding and artisan castes were considered as the servicing groups, denoted by the term *kalanai* or *panimakkaḷ*.⁴¹ However, the herding groups, which were quite numerous, occupied a position better than the artisans. The toddy-tapping caste occupied perhaps the next level. In the Brahman villages the tenant-cultivators, known as *uḷu-kuḍi* or *pēriḷamai*, clearly constituted a fair proportion of the local society from the beginning as the Brahman landholders did not cultivate their lands themselves. Subsequently, in non-Brahman villages too tenant-cultivators were found in good number. Ethnically tenant-cultivators were closer to the landowning non-Brahman Vellāḷa, though occupying a lower rank. The *paraiya*, the leather-workers, and the hunters were assigned the lowest place. The *paraiya*, being the caste of agricultural labour, was quite widespread in the plains, and the members of this group were actually considered as slaves (*aḍimai*) to the landholders and cultivators, both Brahman and non-Brahman. Lacking ownership of any means of production, these slave labourers were at the complete mercy of their masters. Even the death of the slave-owning cultivator could not free them as the latter by custom thereafter became the property of the former's wife and sons.⁴²

Another striking feature of the society was the exclusive nature of the settlements. The central parts of the villages were occupied by the landholding communities, either Brahman (in brahmadeya villages) or Vellāḷa in other villages. The hamlets (*piḍāgai*) attached to big villages were occupied by the landless cultivators and labourers, many of them occupying the lower sections of society. This exclusiveness was also reflected in the caste-based corporate bodies that functioned at village and supra-village levels.⁴³ The *ūrār*, *sabhā*, and *nagarattār* were the primary corporate bodies of landholders at the village level. The *urar* was the corporate body of Vellāḷas in ordinary (*vellānvagai*) villages, the *sabhā* was that of Brahman landholders in Brahman villages, and the *nagarattar* of merchants and landholders in commercial villages and towns.

The *ūr* and *nagaram* were constitutionally of a simple kind, whereas the *sabha*, particularly in the case of some big brahmadeyas, was an elaborate body associated with a number of administrative committees called *vāriyam*. Moreover, it had a constitutional procedure influenced by the precepts of the *dharmashastras*.⁴⁴ Economic status (that is, the landholding) was an important criterion for becoming a member of these corporate bodies. This is explicitly indicated for the *sabhā*, where some additional educational qualification was also needed in some villages. In the case of non-Brahman villages the landholding status of members can be understood on circumstantial evidence. There were both in the Brahman and ordinary villages a large number of other people who were excluded from the above bodies of landholders.

IX

Individual ownership was encouraged in Brahman villages from the beginning.⁴⁵ Ownership in Vellāḷa villages was communal until the tenth century. A clear change in the agrarian system that had been going on throughout the eleventh century was the breakdown of the communal landholding, providing scope for the rise of private landholding and the emergence of a complex tenurial system. The reasons for the growth of private landholding were many, such as increase of service tenures, import of much wealth into the country due to military activities of the Chola kings, large land gifts to temples, and conferment of the *pāḍikāval* or watchmanship rights on local chiefs. The net effect was a sort of feudal tendency showing up with the rise of big landholders—secular as well as religious.⁴⁶ This situation is reflected in the frequent use of the terms *kāṇi* and *parru*. The term *kāṇi* denoted hereditary ownership in property, and the holders of *kāṇi* right (called *kāṇiyālar*) could enjoy a privileged position in the society of the day.⁴⁷ Some of them were big landlords, each owning a big area, even whole villages. An interesting development of this phase is that even in Brahman villages non-Brahman *kāṇi*-holders are prominently seen along with the Brahmans.⁴⁸ This is in stark contrast to the times of Rājārāja I, when only some service tenure holdings of non-Brahmans were permitted within the Brahman settlements.

Temple villages provided much scope for the development of a complex tenurial system. By the twelfth century temples had accumulated large chunks of land, making the presiding deities of those temples *kāṇi*-holders. The *kāṇi* of gods (*tirunāmattu-kāṇi*) could be easily manipulated to become the *kāṇi* of big persons of the concerned localities with the tacit approval of the king. And a part of the superior right in these *kāṇi* was also assigned by the king to the army people and other retainers, such as *padai-parru*, *jivita-parru*, and *vanniya-parru*. The *parru*-holders enjoyed generally superior rights over and above the

kāṇi-holders and, as representatives of the government, they were generally disliked by the latter.⁴⁹ Naturally, conflicts and tension would result from this developing agrarian complexity. Sometimes the kings interfered to resolve the conflicts by controlling the aggressive kāṇi-holders by issuing writs. Thus, a royal order of 1152 warned the rājakulavar ('those of ruling/warrior clans') against purchasing kāṇi in the dēvadāna villages, and warned ordinary cultivators (kuḍimakkal) against purchasing such kāṇi in excess of 2 vēli (about 5 hectares). Two decades later another order contained a similar warning. This time the king ordered that the kāṇi right should not be claimed on any pretext by a member of the rājakulavar, unless he was the kāṇi-holder from olden times and that the old kāṇi-holders who had been deprived of their rights should have their kāṇi rights restored again.⁵⁰ The repeated royal interference only showed that the agrarian crisis was deepening.

X

Supra-local integration was taking place in the society of the Chola period, gaining momentum in the second half. The nāṭṭār (or nāṭṭāvar) were the chief landholders of the vellānvagai villages included in each nāḍu and were found to be active at supra-village level. Most of the royal documents of the sixth to tenth centuries refer to the nāṭṭār body in the context of demarcating the boundaries of a newly-created brahmadeya (and rarely a dēvadāna). Though the orders for the creation of the brahmadeya always emanated from the king, it seems that the participation of the nāṭṭār of the concerned nāḍu in which the eleemosynary settlement was created was crucial at the culminating stage. This may be due to the fact that the new settlement had to be given special privileges and rights, having been freed from the customary revenue demands for which the nāṭṭār were collectively answerable to the king's government. In all these earlier documents the nāṭṭār are found only as a corporate body and no individual member is named. Only from the second half of the tenth century do the Chola inscriptions refer, besides and along with the nāṭṭār, to the brahmadeya-kilavar, that is, Brahman landholders, and the representatives of mercantile settlements and of the eleemosynary settlements, like dēvadāna and *pallichchanda* within the nāḍu. This collective gathering of nāṭṭār is ignored entirely in post-eleventh-century records. Whatever their political and administrative significance earlier, it seems to have been overshadowed by the activities of the bureaucracy by the end of the eleventh century.

For the twelfth and thirteenth centuries evidence is very meagre for the activities of the nāṭṭār in the core area, that is, Thanjavur district.⁵¹ They surface only in the late-thirteenth-century inscriptions of the Pandya rulers who took over this area. The reasons for the disappearance of the nāṭṭār in the central area from the late eleventh century onwards could be: (a) the direct involvement of the Chola government through its own bureaucracy in the administration of their core area; (b) the introduction by Rājarāja I (about AD 1000) of the bigger administrative division of vaḷanāḍu, comprising a number of nāḍus, which actually entailed parts of one and the same nāḍu going to different contiguous vaḷanāḍus; and (c) the increase as well as elaboration of the brahmadeyas until the middle of the eleventh century and the still larger increase of the temple villages throughout the Chola period under the royal patronage. These three factors could have undermined the original predominant position of the nāṭṭār in the local administration as long as the Chola government was there.

The drier areas outside the Chola core area, particularly the area north of the Kaveri river, present a different picture. It is here that we come across for the first time the

chittiramēli-periyanāṭṭār, that is, 'the bigger nāṭṭār with the beautiful plough'. This body was a supra-local assembly over and above the nāṭṭār, encompassing more than one nāḍu. These big gatherings are always found in the context of patronizing a common cult temple dedicated to Vishnu. In this regard they look like big caste organizations of recent times. Actually they are found to be multi-ethnic groups bound by the common profession of agriculture as may be noted from the names of the signatories in some records.⁵² The advent of such supra-local integration of the agrarian groups may be traced to the middle of the eleventh century at the earliest.⁵³

The supra-local bodies of merchants, the Aiyvāṇole-500, called also *disai-āyirattu-ainnūrruvar* (the 'five hundred of the thousand directions') or *padinen-visayam* ('those of the eighteen countries'), spreading over a major part of south India had come into existence even earlier, but they became prominent only from the twelfth century onwards. The representatives of these bodies were drawn from different towns rather than from nāḍus.⁵⁴ On many occasions the supra-local bodies of landholders and merchants met for some common purpose. An important contributory factor for supra-local integration may be the activities of the Chola government itself. The creation of vaṇanāḍus by Rājarāja I was one such. Thus, an inscription of 1264 refers to the *rathakāras* of different vaṇanāḍus in Chōḷa-maṇḍalam, making a big assembly.⁵⁵ A second equally important factor for supra-local integration was the emergence of new landholding castes from previous martial and pastoral groups like the palli and the śrīgōpāla, which seems to explain the early presence in the drier tracts of the supra-local body of agriculturists, *chittiramēli-periyanāṭṭār*. The integration of the new landholders may be suggested as a counterpoise to the old groups. The Right Hand/Left Hand formation of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries has also to be explained as the ultimate outcome of the confrontation of new landholders with old ones.⁵⁶ While a sort of polarization of landholders was taking place, solidarity was also developing among tenant-cultivators. Thus, according to some early thirteenth-century inscriptions of east Tanjavur district,⁵⁷ joint gatherings of these people from several localities protested to their landlords, mostly Brahman, about their sufferings and inability to carry on cultivation due to heavy and arbitrary collection of taxes, particularly various forms of compulsory labour rent (*kuḍimai*).

XI

The impression we get from a study of Chola royal inscriptions is that the elite of the society and government were distinguished by appropriate titles.⁵⁸ Only the elite were entitled to titles and those people found in lower social levels, such as the servicing groups (*paṇichey-makkal*), were denied the privilege of taking them.⁵⁹ Thus, the names reflected the social and economic status of the concerned individuals. The higher the status of a person the longer was his name, composed of segments denoting territorial association, family or gotra, father's name, own given name, and conferred or assumed title. The title segment of a person's name is the most interesting one in that it provides us a variety of titles. Titles based on villages (like village + uḍaiyān) denoted the landholding status of the concerned person in particular villages. Other titles may be broadly classified as those based on caste or profession and those relating to chiefly families. These two categories may be further subdivided according to their prefixing royal titles or territorial titles, or both.

The most prominent title was *mūvēṇḍavēḷān*: three persons out of every 100 of this period held this title. It was always found in a compound form, that is, it was always suffixed

to either the king's title (Rājarāja-mūvēndavēḷān), the name of a nāḍu territory (Inga-nāṭṭu-mūvēndavēḷān), or both (Rajendra-tiruvindalur-nattu-muvendavelan). Nearly 94 per cent of mūvēndavēḷāns had a prefixing king's title. This connection between the royal title and mūvēndavēḷān is very striking. The term vēḷān usually denoted a member of the Veḷḷāḷa caste. So it can be said that the mūvēndavēḷān (the vēḷān of the three kings) title was given to important members of the Veḷḷāḷa caste. Most of the mūvēndavēḷāns were also village-uḍaiyān, showing that they were leading Veḷḷāḷa landholders.

Of the remaining titles, the group ending in the component araiyan (Tamil variant of *rājan*) deserves our attention. Araiyan and its hierarchical variants, *adi-araiyan/adhi-rājan*, *pēr-araiyan*, and *mārāyan/mahārājan* (all meaning 'the greater araiyan' more or less), are found in a variety of compound titles, whose general pattern may be represented as: king's title + caste/profession/chiefly family + araiyan. The titles given to Brahmans included in this group were in the pattern of 'king's title + *brahma* + araiyan', for example, Rājēndrachōḷa-brahma-araiyan. Accomplished artistes or other professionals patronized by the palace were also conferred titles in the above pattern. Taken as a whole the araiyan titles increased with time. Many of these title-holders in the latter half may be considered as chiefs in the sense that they were, as holders of watchmanship (*pāḍikāval*) rights, rulers of some territory, though in many cases it was not bigger than a village or two. Apart from the mūvēndavēḷān and *brahmarāyan* titles based on caste, there were several other titles that were held by the people of different castes who had some claim to a dignified position.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

(*ARE* = *Annual Report on [South] Indian Epigraphy*; *EI*—*Epigraphia Indica*; *SII*—*South Indian Inscriptions*.)

- 1 For a general history of the Chola period, the authoritative work is still K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Chōḷas*, (2 vols) (Madras: University of Madras, 1935–37). All the references in this paper are to the second edition, published in one volume in 1955.

During the 1970s and 1980s there was a renewed activity in Chola studies. Burton Stein (*The Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* [New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980]) made a critical review of Nilakanta Sastri's work and initiated a lively discussion on the nature of the Chola state in particular and the medieval Indian state in general with his introduction of the concept of segmentary state as an alternative to the highly centralized state enunciated by Sastri. Noboru Karashima, with several micro-level studies using quantitative methods, has made several corrections and additions to Sastri's work, particularly relating to the agrarian system of the Chola times. His studies were published later in *South Indian History and Society: Studies from Inscriptions, AD 850–1850*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984). Other works that have made additions to the historiography of the Chola period are listed below: B. Suresh (Pillai), 'Historical and Cultural Geography and Ethnology of South India with Special Reference to the Cola Inscriptions', Ph.D. thesis, Deccan College PG and Research Institute, Pune, 1965; Y. Subbarayalu, *The Political Geography of the Chōḷa Country* (Madras: Tamil Nadu State Dept. of Archaeology, 1973); *ibid.*, 'State in Medieval South India, 600–1350 (With Special Reference to the Pallava and Cola Rulers)', Ph.D. thesis, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, 1976; *ibid.*, 'The Cola State', *Studies in History*, vol. 4, 1982, pp. 269–306; N. Karashima, Y. Subbarayalu, and T. Matsui, *A Concordance of the Names in the Chōḷa Inscriptions* (Madurai: Sarvodaya Ilakkiya Pannai, 1978); Kenneth R. Hall, *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Colas*, (Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1980); George W. Spencer, *The Politics of Expansion: The Chōḷa Conquest of Sri Lanka and Sri Vijaya* (Madras: New Era Publications, 1983); P. Shanmugam, *The Revenue System of the Chōḷas, 850–1279* (Madras: New Era Publications, 1987); R. Tirumalai, *Land Grants and Agrarian Reactions in Cola and Pandya Times* (Madras: University of Madras, 1987); Hermann Kulke (ed.), *The State in India 1000–1700* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995); R. Champakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization in South India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996); James Heitzman, *Gifts of Power: Lordship in an Early Indian State* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

- 2 Sastri, *The Colas*, op. cit., p. 116; George W. Spencer, 'Heirs Apparent: Fiction and Function in Chola Mythical Genealogies', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. XXI, 1984, pp. 415–32.
- 3 R. Champakalakshmi, 'Ideology and the State in South India', paper presented at the seminar on the 'State in Pre-Colonial South India', Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, March 1989.
- 4 For a historical account of the major chiefs, see Sastri, *The Colas*, pp. 400–7.
- 5 Ibid., p. 534.
- 6 Subbarayalu, 'State in Medieval South India, 600–1350', p. 58, n. 80.
- 7 Subbarayalu, *Political Geography of the Chōla Country*, pp. 56–71.
- 8 Ibid., pp. 56–7.
- 9 Ibid., pp. 22, 30–2. Names of some nāḍus (in the Pandya country and Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam) with the suffix components *kulakkīl* or *erikkīl* meaning 'under the tank' confirm the suggestion that they were formed around some irrigation source.
- 10 Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, pp. 46–7.
- 11 Subbarayalu, *Political Geography of the Chōla Country*, pp. 45–6, 92–4.
- 12 R. Champakalakshmi, 'The Agrarian Order in Early Tamil Nadu: Problems and Perspectives', paper presented to ICHR Seminar, Department of PG Studies in History, University of Mangalore, Mangalore, 1989.
- 13 *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*, No. 79: *Karandai Tamil Sangam Plates of Rajendrachola I* (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India [hereafter ASI], 1984).
- 14 T.N. Subramanian mistakenly interpreted the term *vettapperu* as 'lands given to those who performed Vedic sacrifices' (*Transactions of the Archaeological Society of South India*, Madras, 1958–59, pp. 91–2). There is, however, clear evidence linking *vettappēru* lands to those in charge of maintenance of head sluices. *SI*, VIII, No. 689; *SI*, XIII, no. 240.
- 15 C.N. Subramanian, 'Aspects of the History of Agriculture in the Kaveri Delta, c. 850 to 1600', M.Phil dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1984.
- 16 *SI*, XVII, no. 599.
- 17 *SI*, II, no. 205, pp. 37–49.
- 18 This information on officialdom is taken from Subbarayalu, 'State in Medieval South India', where detailed analysis of the relevant data is made, using several tables.
- 19 *EI*, XVIII, pp. 330–8.
- 20 K. Indrapala, 'South Indian Mercantile Communities in Ceylon, c. 950–1250', *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, new series I, 1971, pp. 101–13.
- 21 *ARE*, 1929–30, No. 267–9; *ARE*, 1934–35, p. 61.
- 22 *EI*, XVI, p. 74.
- 23 Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, pp. 69–94. P. Shanmugam, *Revenue System of the Chōlas*, adds about 100 terms more to this list, using a larger corpus of inscriptions from a wider area. The findings, however, are substantially the same. Nilakanta Sastri's pioneer classification of the revenue terms (*The Colas*, p. 522) is inconclusive.
- 24 Y. Subbarayalu, 'An Aspect of the Revenue System of the Cholas', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* (hereafter, *IHC*), XLV Session, (Annamalainagar: 1984). Also Shanmugam, *The Revenue System of the Cholas*, pp. 31–3, 49–52.
- 25 Subbarayalu, 'Classification of Land and Assessment of Land Tax in Early Medieval Tamilnadu from 950 to 1300', *IHC*, XXXVIII Session, Bhubaneswar, 1977, pp. 341–6; Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, pp. 94–9.
- 26 Sastri, *The Colas*, pp. 528–9; Y. Subbarayalu, 'Land Revenue Assessment under the Cholas: An Exercise at Quantification', *IHC*, LI Session, Calcutta, 1991, pp. 200–21.
- 27 *SI*, VI, nos. 50 and 58 (AD 1239) refer to repair works (*kuraivaruppu*) in Rajarajapuram near Kumbakonam, which was one of the capital towns from the ninth century onwards.
- 28 See note 35.
- 29 *SI*, III, No. 57.
- 30 *SI*, VIII, No. 285.
- 31 *EI*, XXII, No 35; *SI*, VII, no. 485; *SI*, XXIII, no. 289.
- 32 Sastri, *The Colas*, p. 499.
- 33 *SI*, V, no. 702.
- 34 *SI*, IV, no. 391; *SI*, V, no. 723.

- 35 Sastri, *The Colas*, p. 474.
- 36 *EI*, XXII, no. 32.
- 37 There has been a growing volume of literature relating to the pre-modern state in India, including the Chola state, in recent decades. Much of the discussion on the Chola state is succinctly summarized in Hermann Kulke (ed.), *The State in India 1000–1700*, pp. 18–31.
- 38 Y. Subbarayalu, 'Social Change in Tamilnadu in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries AD', *South Indian History Congress: Proceedings of II Annual Conference*, Trivandrum, 1981, pp. 138–42.
- 39 During the Chola period there is practically no clue to associate this group with the weaving profession. Perhaps it started as a military group in that period and transformed itself into a weaving caste in post-Chola times. A later tradition of the *kaikkola* caste (Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of South India* vol. III (1909), p. 31) that derives the alternative name *sen-kundar* of this caste from a weapon called *kundam* (spear or lance) seems to preserve the memories of its military origins.
- 40 *SII*, V, no. 1409; *SII*, VII, no. 118.
- 41 *SII*, XIII, no. 58; *SII*, XIX, no. 19; *ARE*, 1914, no. 153.
- 42 *ARE*, 1918, no. 429, 538.
- 43 Sastri, *The Colas*, p. 492; Y. Subbarayalu, *Political Geography of the Chōla Country*, pp. 33–6.
- 44 K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer (*Historical Sketches of Ancient Dekhan* [vol. II] [Coimbatore: 1967], pp. 247, 260, 269, 275) would derive everything connected with the sabha from the *dharmashastra* works.
- 45 Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, pp. 3–16.
- 46 *Ibid.*, pp. 21–31.
- 47 *Ibid.*, pp. 26–7.
- 48 *SII*, XXIII, nos. 381, 383.
- 49 *ARE*, 1943–44, no. 268. This feature became still more prominent in the second half of the thirteenth century when the Pandyas replaced the Cholas. Tirumalai, *Land Grants and Agrarian Reactions*, 1987.
- 50 *ARE*, 1926, nos. 257, 259; *SII*, XXII, No. 31. For a related discussion, N. Karashima, *South Indian History and Society*, pp. 29–31.
- 51 James Heitzman (*Gifts of Power*, p. 556) made an intensive analysis of the inscriptions of two taluks, Kumbakonam and Tirutturaippundi, and concluded that the *nāḍu* assembly was suppressed in the central areas by the end of the tenth century. Actually, the date should be the second half of the eleventh century.
- 52 For example, an inscription at Nellore contains names of Vellāḷas and *raṭṭa-kudī* (later Reddi) as signatories. Also, in the eulogy portion of their inscriptions they are said to belong to all the four gotras. K.G. Krishnan, 'Chittiramēli Periyannāḍu: An Agricultural Guild of Medieval Tamil Nadu', *Journal of Madras University*, vol. LIV, no. 1, 1982.
- 53 *ARE*, 1973–74, no. 188.
- 54 For instance, the Piranmalai inscription (*SII*, VIII, no. 442) of the late thirteenth century refers to representatives from several towns in Pandi-maṇḍalam and Kongu-maṇḍalam as making a big assembly.
- 55 *SII*, VI, no. 439.
- 56 Y. Subbarayalu, 'The Peasantry of the Tiruchirapalli Dt from the 13th to 17th centuries', in N. Karashima (ed.), *Studies in Socio-cultural Change in Villages in Tiruchirapalli Dt, Tamilnadu, India* (Tokyo: ILCAA, 1983), pp. 123–31. It has to be pointed out that there is practically little evidence at this early stage to support the current view, which is mainly based on the evidence of the British period that the Left Hand group comprised mainly the non-agricultural, artisan, and mercantile castes while the Right Hand group comprised the agriculture-based castes. Even the British evidence is equivocal with regard to this classification. Stein, *The Peasant State and Society*, pp. 474–7.
- 57 *SII*, VI, nos. 48, 50, 58; *ARE*, 1918, nos. 429, 538; *ARE*, 1925, no. 253.
- 58 Karashima, *et al.*, *Concordance of Names*, Introduction.
- 59 *ARE*, 1918, nos. 429, 538.

CHAPTER 16

State and Society in Maharashtra

A.R. Kulkarni

The terrain of Maharashtra is divided into high- and low-level tracts by the rugged line of the Western Ghats, which run parallel to the coastline for more than 600 miles. Its natural regions formed by the Western Ghats are: (*a*) the seaboard below the Sahyadri ranges called Konkan, (*b*) the high-level tract or tableland called the Ghatmatha, and (*c*) the plateau along the river valleys called the Desh. The large rocky tracts of the Ghatmatha provided a natural base for forts. It has been regarded as one of the best fortified regions in the India of yesteryears. The scanty rainfall and its uneven distribution in the region, and the varying fertility of the soil, have affected the mode of life and character of the people who have to struggle hard to this day for bare subsistence. These features are believed to have made them tenacious, hard-working, often pugnacious, and lovers of independence.¹ Living in the area bound on the north-west by Gujarat, north by Madhya Pradesh, south by Karnataka, to the south-east by Andhra Pradesh, and west by the Arabian Sea, and speaking the Marathi language, the people of Maharashtra are an admixture of people migrating from the north and indigenous tribes.²

I

Three hundred years of Muslim rule could not destroy the spirit of independence among the Marathas, which they had enjoyed from the days of the Satvahanas to the fall of the Yadvas in the early fourteenth century. The Muslim rulers of the Deccan, particularly the Bahmanis and their successors, did not always work against the indigeneous people. They assigned important positions to them in civil and military administration—their armies were dominated by Hindu cavalry and infantry. Some of the old noble families of Maharashtra, like the Nimbalkars of Phaltan, the Ghatges of Malwadi, the Shirkes of Konkan, the Mohites of Supe, and the Manes of Mhaswad enjoyed titles, positions, and jagirs under the Muslim rulers.³ Many other Maratha families, like the Mores, the Ghorpades, the Dalles, the Savants, the Jadhavs, the Mahadiks, the Gurjars, the Surves, the Jedhes, the Kadams,

the Chalkes, the Malusares, the Solankes, and the Jagadales, who had acquired discipline in arms under the Muslim rulers, proved to be of great help in building the Maratha power, particularly under Shivaji. Barring a few exceptions, the Muslim rulers were tolerant towards their Hindu subjects in religious matters. They did not indulge in wholesale conversion. They did not disturb the old customs and institutions, particularly the village administration, which was entirely under the people of the village. Thus, both in civil and military administration, Muslim rule prepared the ground in the long run for the establishment of Maratha power.

According to Rajwade, the immediate cause of the rise of Maratha power was the struggle between the Deccani and the Pardeshi Muslims hailing from Central Asia for supremacy in Ahmadnagar. Disgusted with their constant struggle, Nizam Shah (1600–1610) decided to create a new party, the Maratha party, under the leadership of Maloji Bhonsle, to check the struggle for supremacy among Muslims.⁴

The growing importance of Shahji, the son of Maloji, in the politics of the Nizam Shahi and Adil Shahi kingdoms ultimately became the foundation of Maratha power under Shivaji. After the death of Maloji, Shahji became the leader of the Maratha party at the Nizam Shahi court. His role in defending the Nizam Shah, against the combined forces of the Mughals and the Adil Shah in 1624 made Malik Ambar jealous of his growing importance, and denied any reward for his achievements. Disgusted with Malik Ambar, he accepted the Adil Shahi offer of a position second to the commander-in-chief, and joined the Bijapur service in 1625. The death of Malik Ambar in 1626, however, gave him an opportunity to return to Ahmadnagar. When Shahji's father-in-law Lakhaji Jadhav was murdered by Nizam Shahi officials, the Jadhavs sought asylum with the Mughals, and Shahji too entered Mughal service in 1630. However, when he found that some parts of his jagir had been arbitrarily transferred to another person, he decided to quit in 1632.

Shahji took advantage of the unstable political situation prevailing in Ahmadnagar, captured a large chunk of the Nizam Shahi territory, and raised a formidable force of cavalry to establish his authority in the area. Both the Mughal and Adil Shahi rulers were now inducing him to join their side against Nizam Shah. But Shahji sent feelers to the Adil Shahi *wazir* that he should help the Nizam Shah. This line of thinking appealed to the *wazir*. With the support of some nobles of the Nizam Shah, Shahji raised the young prince Murtaza III to the throne in 1633 and started transacting the business of the kingdom.⁵ His action invited a serious invasion of Ahmadnagar by the Mughals in 1634. Shahji could not withstand the imperial attack for a long time and ultimately surrendered all the forts he held. He handed over Murtaza Nizam Shah III also to the Mughals. The kingdom of Ahmadnagar was turned into a province of the Mughal empire in 1636.

Shahji's personal jagir included Pune, Supe, Indapur, and Chakan—an area lying between the Neera and Bhima rivers. It was adjacent to the Mughal frontier in the Deccan, which served as a check to Mughal advances against Bijapur. The Mughals instructed the Adil Shah not to post Shahaji near his jagir. Accordingly, he was sent to Karnataka to manage Adil Shahi territories in that region. Before leaving Pune for Karnataka in 1636, he assigned a part of his jagir in the Maval area to his son Shivaji, who was not even six years old. Dadoji Kondadev was asked to administer the jagir in Shahji's absence. Shivaji was taken to Karnataka. When he reached the age of twelve, Shahji gave him a *peshwa* (minister), a *majumdar* (revenue officer), a *dabir* (diplomat), a *sarnobat* (commander), and a *sabnis* (an officer to look after the military) to manage perhaps his entire jagir under the guidance of Dadoji Kondadev. At the same time, Kanhoji Jedhe, one of the prominent *deshmukhs* of Maval, who had earlier helped in controlling the unruly *deshmukhs* of the area, was

informed that Shivaji was at Pune, and he should serve him loyally with his forces. He was asked to take an oath of loyalty. Kanhoji assured Shivaji: 'Your father has obtained an oath from me and sent me into your service. I am prepared to remain true to it. I am at your service with my five sons and all my men, and will fight to death for you. I cannot falsify my sacred promise.'⁶ When the commander of Bijapur, Afzal Khan, invaded the territory of Shivaji, Kanhoji assembled the *deshmukhs* and told them, 'This is our Maharashtra Raj. We must protect it with courage and our contingents and by serving Shivaji loyally'. The *Deshmukhs* unanimously and spontaneously declared their support to Shivaji.⁷

Shivaji's political career began with the acquisition of the Pune jagir, yielding a revenue of 40,000 *hons*, according to his contemporary biographer, Sabhasad. In the initial stages of his career he had to fight with his own people as well as the neighbouring rulers. A jagirdar had the possession of the territory, but he had no control over the forts lying in the territory of the jagir. Significantly, therefore, Shivaji started capturing forts: Sinhagad, Purandar, Rohida, Torana, Rajgad, and Chakan. This enabled him to meet any sudden attack from the enemy. He tried to secure the goodwill of the powerful *Deshmukhs* who wielded full control over the people under their jurisdiction. He did not hesitate to punish them if they did not join him in his mission. For instance, when the More of Javali, the most powerful Maratha sardar under Adil Shah, refused to join Shivaji, he was reduced to the level of an ordinary zamindar. His jagir of Javali, which was of great strategic importance, was captured.

After consolidating his leadership in his jagir, Shivaji could successfully deal with the Adil Shahi of Bijapur, the Qutb Shahi of Golkonda, and the Mughals. Without going into his political activities in detail, it must be underlined that he formed an alliance with the Qutb Shahi ruler to prevent the Mughals from annexing the Adil Shahi kingdom. Protection of the Deccan was a salient feature of his political policy. It is interesting to note that the Adil Shahi Bijapur and the Qutb Shahi Golkonda were annexed by the Mughals only after the death of Shivaji in 1680.

Shivaji could check the Deccan powers from intruding into his *swaraj* territory, but the Mughals were too strong for him. He could oblige the Mughal commander Shaista Khan to retreat in 1663, he could plunder Surat, which was the most important Mughal port in western India in 1664, but he could not withstand the attack of Mirza Raja Jai Singh. He had to bow before him and conclude a humiliating treaty with him in 1665—the Treaty of Purandar, which obliged him to surrender twenty-three of his important forts, and to agree to visit Aurangzeb at Agra. His miraculous escape from Agra in 1666 enabled him to pick up old threads.

On his return, Shivaji started regaining his lost forts and consolidating his power. He got himself coronated in 1674, declared himself to be the sovereign ruler of the Marathas, issued his own gold coin (*shivarai*), started a new era called *Rajshaka*, and became the Chhatrapati of the Marathas. The Mughal forces descended on the Deccan in a relentless pursuit of Shivaji, but they could not wipe out his newly created sovereign state. Shivaji died in 1680, but his sons Sambhaji (1680–89) and Rajaram (1689–1707), and the dowager queen Tarabai, heroically resisted the imperial forces to save the Maratha state from becoming a part of the Mughal empire. The resistance of the Marathas has been described as the Maratha War of Independence by some respectable historians. Aurangzeb could annex Bijapur in 1686 and Golkonda in 1689, but he could not wipe out the Marathas. Instead of subjugating them, he died in their country.

II

We may outline the administrative system of Shivaji in his swaraj in order to appreciate the changes in the post-Shivaji period. The *Rajvyavahar Kosh*, a glossary of political terminology compiled at the instance of Shivaji to replace all Persian and Arabic terms current in Maratha administration, bears eloquent testimony to the influence of Muslim concepts on the Maratha system.⁸ The swaraj was divided into three parts, each assigned to a responsible minister designated as *sarkarkun*. The northern division covered the territory from Kalyan-Bhivandi to Kolvan, Salher of the Varghat (above the *ghats*) and a part of the Konkan, including the areas from Lohagad and Junner to the twelve Mavals. Moropant Pingle, the prime minister, was in charge of this division. The southern division covered the Konkan territory from Cheul to Dabhol, Rajapur, Kudal, Bande to Phonda. It was called Talghat (below the ghat). Annaji Datto, the finance minister, held this division. The south-eastern division extended from Wai to Koppal-Tungabhadra in Karnataka. It was called Desh, and held by Dattojipant, the mantri or *waqia-navis*. Konkan, Varghat, and Desh, the three primary divisions of Shivaji's kingdom in 1674, broadly corresponded to the districts of Raigad, Ratnagiri, Thane, Nasik, Pune, Satara, and Kolhapur of modern Maharashtra. Thus, his swaraj lay between the Godavari and Tungabhadra rivers.

After his coronation, Shivaji launched an expedition into Karnataka and brought Koppal, Belavade, Hoskote, Shire, Kolar, Vellore, and Ginji under his control and placed these territories under his son Sambhaji. This part of his kingdom 'lying between the rivers Tungabhadra and Kaveri' was called *Chandiche* (Ginji) *rajya*. The Mughal areas from which chauth was collected was called the *Mongali*, and officers were appointed for the collection of chauth.⁹

As the crowned prince of the Maratha state, Shivaji directed all its activities. The *Ajnapatra*, a treatise on the Maratha state policy, narrates the general principles of kingship and the duties of the king, but hardly any rules were laid down in Shivaji's time.¹⁰ From his achievements, however, one can say without hesitation that his government was rationally organized and guided by noble ideas of beneficence as promised in his seal 'which shines for the welfare of all'. Jadunath Sarkar observes, 'The historian of Shivaji at the end of a careful study of all the records about him in eight different languages, is bound to admit that Shivaji was not only the maker of the Maratha nation, but also the greatest constructive genius of medieval India.'¹¹

The origin of the council of ministers can be traced to Shivaji's management of the Pune jagir with the help of the four ministers Shahji gave him. Shivaji added four ministers to this nucleus under the influence of an old Sanskrit text *Shukraniti*. Their duties were as follows :

1. Peshwa (Persian) or *mukhya pradhan* (Sanskrit): His supervises the general administration, represented the king in his absence, and promoted harmony among the officers, also put the seal on all royal documents and led the armed forces in battle.
2. Majumdar (Persian) or *amatya* (Sanskrit): He checked all accounts of public income and expenditure, and countersigned all statements of accounts, both of the kingdom in general and the districts in particular. Like the Peshwa, he was also required to lead forces if necessary.
3. The *waqia-navis* (Persian) or *mantri* (Sanskrit): He was not a mere chronicler, but a kind of home minister. According to the *Qanu Zabata*, he was to deliberate on all political problems. He was to compile a daily record of the king's activities and court incidents. His seal was necessary for all royal documents.

4. *Shahur-navis* (Persian) or *sachiv* (Sanskrit): As superintendent, his main duty was to look after the royal correspondence, and affix the words on the top *shuru shud*, that is, 'here it begins'. In addition, he had to check the accounts of the mahals and parganas.
5. *Dabir* (Persian) or *sumant* (Sanskrit): As foreign secretary, he was the adviser of the king on relations with foreign states regarding war and peace. He collected secret information about other countries, dealt with the foreign envoys, and maintained the dignity of the state abroad.
6. *Sarnobat* (Persian) or *senapati* (Sanskrit): He was the commander-in-chief of the Maratha state.
7. *Sadr* and *muhtasib* (Persian) or *panditrao* and *dandadyaksha* (Marathi): He was the ecclesiastical head of the state, looking after the religious matters. He was to honour and reward learned Brahmans in accordance with their intellectual attainments on certain festive occasions. In addition to this, he had to decide theological questions and caste disputes, to fix dates for religious ceremonies, and punish irreligious acts of the people.
8. *Quzi ul-quzat* (Persian) or *nyayadish* (Sanskrit): His duty as chief justice of the state was to try civil and criminal cases according to the Hindu law and endorse all judicial decisions.¹²

Every province was divided into subhas (equivalent to the modern districts), each subha yielding income varying from 125,000 to 175,000 hons. Each subha contained a number of parganas, like modern *talukas*, and each pargana was made up of several groups of villages called *taraf* or *quryat* or *samat*. The number of villages in this unit varied from six to forty. The term mahal was used for any revenue-paying area in a subha. *Tapa* was a small tract of country, smaller than a pargana, but consisting of a reasonable number of villages. Thus, *tapa*, *quryat*, *samat*, and *mahal* seem to be synonyms. The subha was placed under an officer, called *subhedar*, who was assisted by an accountant (*majumdar*), and some clerks. He was selected from among the best officials of the pargana. The *majumdar* was expected to be inquisitive, intelligent, and well-conversant with accounts and was therefore selected with great care.¹³ The *majumdar* of the subha was also entrusted with the job of keeping accounts of the mahals of the subha. The state officials in charge of the mahal were the *havaladar* and the *karkun*. They were assisted by hereditary officials, such as *deshmukhs* and *deshpandes*. Clerks were appointed for the lower administrative units.

The village, called *mauja*, *dehe*, or *gava*, was the lowest revenue unit. The village headman called *patil* or *gramani* was assisted by the village accountant called *kulkarni* or *gramlekhaka*. The *chougula*, an assistant to the *patil*, was in charge of the collection of the revenue of the village. The work of village officials was supervised by state officials. Shivaji instructed his officials to meet the cultivators personally and, if necessary, to collect revenue instead of relying entirely on the hereditary officials. This was something new, which perhaps did not exist under the Adil Shahi or Mughal rule.¹⁴

Shivaji introduced the measurement and classification of land, following the system of Malik Ambar with some modifications. The measuring pole of wood (*kathi*) was adopted as the standard for demarcating boundaries. The length of the *Shivashahi kathi* was five cubits and five closed fists (*muthis*). Land was measured in bighas. The area of the bigha was 400 square *kathis*; 120 bighas formed a *chavar*.¹⁵ The land was classed as first rate (*aval*), second rate (*dum*), and third rate (*seem*) on the basis of its fertility.

Malhar Ramrao Chitnis, a chronicler of Shivaji, mentions that three assessments were made by three different persons: by Dadoji Kondadev around 1636, by Moro Trimal around 1648, and by Annaji Datto (the finance minister of Shivaji) in 1678. The third assessment

was the most systematic. The first step was to record all arable land in terms of holdings, and the class to which each holding belonged. The next step was to prepare a crop-wise estimate of the produce of each holding, and of each class per bigha, for assessment purposes. One of the distinguishing features of this system was the participation of pargana officials, village officials, and cultivators in working out the estimate of the produce of the village under consideration.¹⁶

The land actually under cultivation was considered for assessment. Wasteland and land occupied by trees or by common pasture was excluded from assessment, which was made in kind or cash or both. It seems that Shivaji fixed the state demand at two-fifths of the gross produce in kind. Assessment in cash was made on land growing cash crops. Available records do not formally indicate how the cash rates were arrived at. Obviously, they had some relation to the produce and its value in cash. Cash rates were generally associated with 'garden lands' producing crops like sugarcane, ginger, turmeric, and vegetables.

It appears that Shivaji introduced *batai* settlement only in some areas like Rohidkhorer and Paunmaval in 1676–77, and the share of the government generally became one half of the produce. This led to a rise in prices of foodgrains. To maintain an equilibrium, the government used to release foodgrains from its stocks in such a situation.¹⁷

Land revenue was collected twice a year: in May, after the rabi harvest, and in October, after the kharif harvest. Like Malik Ambar, Shivaji tried to abolish all intermediaries and establish direct relations with the cultivators. He was determined to protect the cultivators from the zamindars, the deshmukhs and the deshpandes. He took every precaution to check corruption. He insisted that in the *batai* settlement the cultivators should not be overburdened with illegal exactions. If they deserted their lands for some reason, they were induced to return by condoning their past arrears. Officers were instructed not to disturb the cultivators during the time of ploughing and sowing. They were not to be pressed for arrears, and under no circumstances would their agricultural implements be confiscated for realizing the arrears.

The revenue officials sometimes collected the revenue in cash to avoid the trouble of collecting in kind and storing the proceeds properly, particularly in the Konkan area, where the mode of payment was coconuts and betelnuts. Shivaji instructed the officials to collect the revenue in the manner prescribed by the state. As the wealth of the state and the people depended on agriculture, Shivaji gave all sorts of facilities like interest-free loans, seeds, concessions in revenue payments, and many other things for promoting agriculture to increase the income of the Maratha state.¹⁸

The village as a unit of economic organization aimed at self-sufficiency with various minor industries and occupations in addition to agriculture. The village folk mostly depended for their everyday needs on the labour of the artisans. Attempts, therefore, were made to keep the artisans in the village itself by assuring them adequate means of subsistence, either by land grants or a share in the agricultural produce of each cultivator. The village artisans generally manufactured for local consumption. Only skilled artisans found better opportunities for selling their articles in the bigger market, called *gasba peth*, where shoes, blankets, cloth, salt, iron, and articles of wood were brought for sale. Caste was the basis of occupational organizations and people rarely went out of their family calling. Village artisans had, therefore, a secure place in the village community.¹⁹

The market was a well-organized unit. The chief person responsible for setting up a market, with a licence or sanad from the government, was called *shete*, and the officer who helped him in maintaining the accounts was called mahajan. The *shete* also acted as the

kotwal of the market, and in that capacity he must have exercised police and magisterial duties. He enjoyed many privileges in the village community. The qasba peth contained many permanent shops. Many outside merchants and artisans, with a variety of commodities, attended the weekly bazaars of the qasba. The shete used to maintain a register of *kadim* (old) and *jadid* (new) members of the market, and record the number of resident and outside merchants.²⁰

Shivaji realized the importance of trade and adopted the policy of attracting merchants to his dominions. Ramachandra Pant Amatya, the compiler of *Ajnapatra*, summarizes the commercial policy in these words:

Merchants are the ornaments of the kingdom and the glory of the king. They are the cause of the prosperity of the kingdom. All kinds of goods which are not available come into the kingdom. . . . In times of difficulties whatever debt is necessary is available. There is a great advantage in the protection of the merchants. For this reason the respect due to merchants can be maintained. On no account should strong action be taken against them, nor should they be disrespected. In the capital market, great merchants should be induced to come and settle.²¹

Merchants of different nationalities, like the Portuguese, English, Dutch, French, Danes, Persians, and Arabs, had commercial contacts with Maharashtra in medieval times. However, Shivaji did not allow them to settle in his kingdom on a long-term basis. He instructed his officers never to give them places to settle, particularly in the interior, or to allow them to visit sea forts. If a place had to be given sometimes for a factory, it was not to be given at the mouth of an inlet or on the shores of the sea; it was to be low-lying, within the range and control of the neighbouring town.²² The Konkan had many flourishing trading centres during Shivaji's time. Chaul, Dabhol, Kalyan, Bhivandi Vengurla, and Pen were prosperous centres of commerce and industry. Chaul and Dabhol were port towns, and ranked with Surat and Goa.²³

Salt manufacturing was the most important industry of the Konkan coast, and many salt pans were working in the region of Thana and Kolaba. This industry was subsidiary to agriculture, and it provided employment to the cultivators when they were not engaged in cultivation. Salt was exported to various parts in India and outside India. It contributed to the growth of shipbuilding industry in Maharashtra, as Shivaji had to maintain a salt fleet.²⁴ Shivaji imposed a high tariff duty on the import of salt in order to make the home product available at a low price.²⁵ He put certain restrictions on the commercial activities of the East India Company, but at the same time he tried to maintain friendly relations with them.²⁶

Many sources other than land revenue were exploited by the Maratha state during the medieval period. There were direct taxes on income, professions, and property. A substantial amount of revenue was raised by indirect taxes such as custom duties, transit duties, octroi, sales tax, and excise duties on manufacturers. Administration of justice brought in a small amount in the form of fines and judicial fees.

All unclaimed property belonged to the king. He also received presents from officers and from foreigners who called on him to obtain certain concessions and privileges. Spoils of war and plunder also sometimes added to the income of the state. Chauth, a military levy or tribute exacted from a weak ruler by the strong from the Mughal territory, and sardeshmukhi, which amounted to one-tenth of the total revenue of a subha, a royal prerogative, replenished the treasury of Shivaji to an appreciable extent. The state earned some profits from its public undertakings, like canals, mints, and trading. Like the Mughals, Shivaji established eighteen karkhanas and twelve mahals to meet the needs of the state,

and not for profit as under the Mughals. Nevertheless, he must have made some profit out of his monopoly of salt as well as from the sale of various commodities collected in kind by way of revenue.²⁷

It is rather difficult to ascertain the probable income of Shivaji's kingdom for want of authentic state papers. However, from an unpublished and undated document found in the Pune archives, one gets an account of the extent of Shivaji's swaraj and the probable income of its three major divisions. According to this document, the three divisions of the swaraj were Talkonkan, Varghat, and Desh, with a total of thirty-six subhas in all. The income in terms of Patshahi hon is given below :

Talkonkan (thirteen subhas)	142,00,000
Varghat (eight subhas)	7,25,000
Desh (fifteen subhas)	1,575,000
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Total	16,500,000 hors

The Patshahi hon, struck by Muhammad Shah of Bijapur was equal to three and a half Alamgiri rupees.²⁸

The main items of expenditure of the state were the king, the civil administration, the military administration, agriculture and other miscellaneous activities. The Maratha king apparently led a very simple life. His expenditure included such items as family, wardrobe and jewellery, coronation, charity, religion, and patronage to learning. Expenditure on civil administration included salaries of the ministers and various other officials of the central, provincial, and local governments. A chronicler of Shivaji, gives the annual salaries of the ministers in hors :

Prime minister or peshwa	:	15,000
Amatya or majumdar	:	12,000
Other ministers	:	10,000

The *chitnis* (chief secretary) was paid 6,000 hors per annum and the *phadnis* (officer in charge of the finances of the state) got 2,000 hors per annum. The salaries of other officials and clerks of the secretariat are not mentioned, except for the officials of the karkhanas and mahals who were getting salaries varying from 500 to 100 hors per annum.²⁹

The subhedar and his karkun each got a salary of 400 hors per year, but the status of the subhedar was higher as he had the privilege of maintaining a palanquin. The majumdar, another officer of the subha, drew a salary varying between 100 and 125 hors a year. A subha generally had two mahals, and the officer in charge of a mahal, the havaldar, received from three to five hors, perhaps per month. The majumdar of the mahal was paid at the rate of three, four or five hors per month or fifty to seventy hors per year.³⁰ The pargana and village hereditary officers possessed rent-free land and enjoyed many prerequisites in lieu of salary for their services. The state bore a part of the village expenditure in certain matters, such as maintenance of temples, religious festivals, and perhaps defence.³¹

Apart from the salaries and allowance of army officials, the state incurred expenditure on wars, camps, and the organization of forts. The strength of Shivaji's army at the time of his coronation was about 208,260. The senapati, the chief of the army, being a member of the council of ministers drew a salary of 10,000 hors per annum, and the other commanders

drew a salary between 500 and 4000 *hons* per annum. The salaries of the lower ranks varied from fifteen to 200 *hons* per annum.

Among the cavalry officers, the *sarnobat* received 5,000 to 4,000 *hons* a year; *panchhazari* 2,000 *hons*; *hazari* 1,000 *hons*; *jumledar* 500 *hons*; *havaladar* 125 *hons*; and *bargir* nine *hons* per annum. The personal staff of the *panchhazari*, *jumledar*, and *havaladar*, like the *majumdar*, *karbhari* and *jamenaris*, got 500 *hons* per annum. The *majumdar* of a *jumledar* was paid between 100 and 125 *hons* per annum. The infantry had a similar structure of officials, but the details of their salaries, except in the case of the *hazari* and *jumledar*, who drew 500 and 100 *hons* per annum respectively, are not available. The salary of the *sabnis* of *hazari* was between 100 and 125 *hons*, whereas that of a *jumledar* was 40 *hons* per annum only.³² From the *bakhar* of Sabhasad, we get details of the naval strength of the Marathas, but no information regarding the salaries of the officials and other staff.

The Maratha state paid special attention to the maintenance of forts and strongholds during the time of Shivaji. It seems that Shivaji sanctioned nearly 125,000 *hons* from his privy purse for repairs and construction of modest residential quarters at many forts such as Sinhagad, Sindhudurg, Vijaydurg, Suvarnadurg, Pratapgad, Purandargad, and Raigad. The salaries of the officials of the forts are available, but whether they were paid monthly or annually is not clear. The *havaladar* received 125, with twenty-five *hons* added for two servants. The *sarnobat* received 100 *hons*; the *tatsarnobat*, twelve *hons*; the superintendent of buildings 125 *hons* plus ten *hons* for one servant; and the *sabnis* received 100 *hons*.

The soldiers and officials were given additional allowances for meritorious work. Shivaji conferred pensions, bounties, and prizes on those who shed their blood for the state. Wounded soldiers were given rewards twenty-five to 200 *hons* per head, depending on the nature of the wound received. The money spent on arms, armaments, military equipment, camps, and the actual cost and gains of various expeditions cannot be estimated. The expenditure on public undertakings, like canal irrigation, salt industry, shipbuilding, warehouses, and mints took a large share from the state income.³³

Shivaji's army consisted mainly of infantry and cavalry, with a navy of modest strength. According to Sabhasad, the strength of his army was 208,200, including his personal guards. There were 60,000 *shiledars* under thirty-one colonels, 45,000 *paga* under twenty-nine colonels, and 100,000 *mawales* under thirty-five colonels. There were 1,260 elephants.³⁴ In the initial stages Shivaji built up his infantry by drawing people from his jagir area, called *mawales*; they were of stronger build, hardier, and simpler than the people of other regions. The *mawales* were expert climbers and excelled in marksmanship. Their arms consisted of swords, shields, daggers, poniards, straight rapiers, spears, bows and arrows, and when possible, matchlocks.

These men brought their own arms and were only furnished with ammunition by government. Their dress, though not uniform, was generally a pair of short drawers coming half-way down the thigh, a strong narrow band of considerable length tightly girt about the loins, a turban and sometimes a cotton frock. Most of them wore a cloth, round their waist, which likewise answered the purposes of a *shawl*.³⁵

Every ten soldiers had an officer called *naik*, and every fifty a *havaladar*. The officer over 100 was called *jumledar* and the commander of 1,000 was called *hazari*. Over the *hazaris*, there was the *sarnobat* who commanded 7,000 infantry.

In cavalry there were two types of troopers: the *bargirs* and the *shiledars*. The *bargirs* got horses and equipment from the government, whereas the *shiledars* supplied their own horses and arms. For over twenty-five *bargirs* there was one *havaladar*; over five *havaladars*, one *jumledar*,

and over ten jumledars, one hazari. The higher officers were the panchhazari and the sarnobat of cavalry. The shiledars, though organized on a different way, were under the orders of the same sarnobat of cavalry and ranked lower than the paga horseman, that is, the bargir.

The Maratha army possessed minimal equipment. It could, therefore, move with great celerity. Shivaji's camp was a simple affair, and compared to the Mughal camps it was much less expensive.³⁶ Sabhasad writes that Shivaji did not permit any person to take his wife, maidservant, or concubine to the battlefield, and if anybody was found violating this rule, he was punished with death. Francois Martin, the French envoy who spent three days in his camp in Karnataka, endorses this statement of Sabhasad. Shivaji's camp was without any pomp, 'baggage or women'. There were only two tents made of a thick simple material, a small one for himself and the other one for his ministers. According to a Dutch document, Shivaji had only one *shamiana*, the people were living in the open.³⁷

Amatya in his *Ajnapatra* says that the 'essence of the whole kingdom is forts. If there are no forts, and when a foreign invasion comes, the open country becomes supportless, and the surrounding country becomes desolated, and the people get routed and broken up'.³⁸ There were three types of forts: Durga or Gadkot were hill forts; Bhuikot or land forts; and Jaladurga or Janjira were marine forts. Sabhasad estimated that at the time of his death Shivaji had no less than 240 forts and strongholds.³⁹

Every fort was placed under three officers, namely the havaladar, sabnis, and karkhani of equal status, and they acted in unison. The havaladar, it was laid down, should be a Maratha of a good family, the sabnis should be a Brahman known to his personal staff, and the karkhanis a Prabhu. The havaladar was the head of the garrison and was entrusted with the keys of the fort. He was to see that the gates were closed at nightfall and opened at daybreak. The sabnis was in charge of accounts and the karkhanis of the commissariat. In a bigger fort the havaladar was assisted by officers who watched over the walls of the fort at night. Besides these main officials there were other persons associated with the administration of the forts, such as superintendent of buildings, majumdars, and clerks wherever necessary. The garrison was armed with swords, spears, matchlocks, and muskets. Some of the forts had cannon. Stones were heaped for use when the fort was attacked by the enemy.⁴⁰

Amatya underlines the importance of the navy: 'Just as a King's fame for success on land is in proportion to the strength of his cavalry, so is the mastery of the sea in the hands of him who possesses the navy. Therefore, a navy should necessarily be built.'⁴¹ When Shivaji acquired some coastal districts and was confronted with the naval powers like the Portuguese, Siddis, Dutch, and English, he felt the necessity of maintaining a navy for the defence of his state. Sabhasad tell us that Shivaji had a naval force comprising 400 *gurabs*, *tarandes*, *tarus*, *galbats*, *shibars*, and *pagars*. They were formed into two squadrons (of 200 vessels, according to Marathi sources), commanded by two admirals who had the title of Darya Sarang and Mai Naik. The strength of the fighting vessels of Shivaji given in the English records is about sixty.⁴²

Justice was administered in a simple way during the time of Shivaji. The village community was left to settle its disputes with the resources available to it. The headman or patil used to settle disputes by arbitration with the help of elderly persons. In case of his failure, the matter was referred for decision to a panchayat appointed by the village. If one of the aggrieved parties did not accept the decision of the panchayat, an appeal was made to the *mamlatdar*. If he was convinced that the panchayat was not prejudiced or corrupt, he used to uphold the decision of the panchayat. In serious or important suits, the mamlatdar used to appoint an arbitrator or a panchayat with the approval of the parties concerned. In such

cases the verdict of the arbitrator or the panchayat was subject to an appeal to the peshwa or his chief justice, the *nyayadhish*, who was a member of the Council of Ministers. All decisions regarding religious and caste disputes were taken by *dharma sabha*, with the *panditrao*, the *nyayadhish*, and a few other officials as its members. The decision was communicated to the winning party by a document called *mahajar*, endorsed by all the members of the *sabha* by affixing their signatures and professional symbols or seals.

III

The village community remained the main administrative unit in Maharashtra. It was organized on the principle of hereditary rights in land. In the report on the 'Village Communities of the Deccan' by R.N. Goodine (1852) the village is defined as:

a self-constituted corporation, organized rather from the primitive necessity of its inhabitants than by design, and strengthened and perpetuated by the hereditary succession of its office-bearers. The village, thus, became the only centre of stability and the repository of civil rights; it was the only institution which the people possessed and the only object of their national attachment.⁴³

The Maratha village was a close-knit unit. The hereditary officers who held land and enjoyed perquisites were called *deshaks*, meaning active and permanent residents of the village performing various administrative and miscellaneous duties for the village. The Marathas made a distinction between the authority of the state and the authority of the village, the former being temporary and the latter permanent.

The residents of the village were classified as *watandars*, *mirasdars*, *uparis*, and *balutedars*. The *watandars* were the holders of *watan*, that is, land granted by the state to a person holding a certain office. The grant continued in his family so long as services were rendered efficiently and loyally. In common parlance it was called *chakari-watan* or land granted for service. The villagers paid the *watandar* in cash and kind for his services; his rights and perquisites were called *haklajimas*. A change in government hardly affected their position. The power of the state was decentralized through this system, and many issues were decided on the spot instead of referring them to the central government. In view of the difficulties of transport and communication, the system was the need of the times. Shivaji continued the system without any change.

The *patil* and the *kulkarni* were the village *watandars*, whereas the *deshmukh* and the *deshpande* were the *watandar* officials of the *pargana*. The *patil*, also called *mokaddam* or *mokaddam-patil*, was the chief hereditary official of the village. His office insignia was the plough, indicating his duties in connection with land, and his main duty was to bring idle and barren land under cultivation. He was responsible for collecting the land revenue and remitting it to the royal treasury. Being a member of the village council (*gotsabha*), he conducted its meetings and also tried to maintain peace and order in the village. For these services he was entitled to get a share from the revenue and to levy marriage tax (*varhad taka*), divorce tax (*patdam*), and a transit tax on the cattle. He levied seniority rights (*manpan*), and received things of daily consumption both in cash (*kurda*) and kind, (*khurda*), like a handful of any corn (*phaski*), unripe jowar (*hurda*) from cultivators, and various articles from artisans and shopkeepers.

The *kulkarni*, also referred to as *gavkulkarni* or *gramlekhi*, received a grant called *lekhanvritti* (grant for writing) for his services as village accountant. He kept a record of the land held by the individual cultivators of the village, called *gao-zada*, and the revenue due from each. Every village had a *patil*, but not necessarily a *kulkarni*, perhaps due to the

dearth of literate persons available for clerical jobs. One person often used to hold charge of more than one village, and used to get the work done through his deputies called *mutaliqs*. Like the patil, the kulkarni enjoyed some haklajimas mentioned in his watan deed, which were collected both in kind (*gala*) and cash (*nakhta*). Generally, the kulkarni's share in the village revenues was half of the patil's share.

The deshmukh was the counterpart of the patil at the pargana level. He held hereditary lands in the villages under their jurisdiction and supervised the work of the patils in his jurisdiction. He could allot fallow lands to needy persons for bringing more land under cultivation by charging progressive rates of assessment till the land was in a position to bear the full tax. He acted as the state's link with the villages. He offered them protection from external aggression and represented the case of the villagers for relief in times of natural calamities. He was entitled to enjoy haklajimas from villages under his jurisdiction. He received these payments both in cash and kind. He used to carry away a larger share from the villagers than any other hereditary official.

The deshpande at the pargana level supervised the work of kulkarnis in his area. Just as the kulkarni was subordinate to the patil, the deshpande was subordinate to the deshmukh. He enjoyed rent-free land in lieu of his services to the village communities. The rights and perquisites of the deshpande included cash payments and payments in kind from the villages in his jurisdiction. There was no difference regarding the rights and perquisites between these two officials, but usually the share of the deshpande was half the share of the deshmukh.

The other watandar officials of the village community were *chaugula*, the shete, and the mahajan. The chaugula assisted the patil in his work of measurement of land, collection of land revenue, promotion of cultivation, and administration. The shete and mahajan were the hereditary officials of the *peth* or *market*. The shete was responsible for the organization of the market, while the mahajan maintained the accounts. For these services they were entitled to payments in cash and kind from the village. As every village did not have a market, the shetes and mahajans were members of only those village communities where a market was established.⁴⁴

The mirasdars were peasant proprietors having permanent hereditary rights in the lands held by them. They cultivated most of the village land and enjoyed all the privileges of the village communities. The *upris* were also cultivators, but they did not possess proprietary rights in the lands they cultivated. They could acquire such rights after some years by paying a present (*nazar*) to the government. As they belonged to the class of agricultural labour, they had no locus standi in the village. They were regarded as strangers (*upris*) and did not enjoy the privileges of the village communities till they became peasant proprietors. The balutedars were a class of persons who held land in the village for rendering services for the economic development of the village. *Baluta* means a share, and a person performing specific duties for a fixed grain share from the farmer was called balutedar. The cultivators paid the village artisans at the time of the annual harvest for the services rendered by them. They were permanent residents of the village, and participated in the deliberations of the body of permanent residents of the village (*got-sabha*) with their professional insignias. Traditionally, their number was fixed at twelve, or *barabalute*, but the number varied according to the requirements of the village.

The balutedars can be broadly divided into three major groups. The carpenter, the potter, the blacksmith, the barber, the washerman, and the shoemaker may be included in the group of artisans and professionals. The *mahar*, *taral*, *manga*, and *ramoshi* were the performers of menial services. The mahar enjoyed the status of watandar and was regarded

as the 'village eye', a living chronicle of its concerns. The taral was the messenger of the village government. The manga served as watchman, and traced theft and other crimes in the village. Then, there were performers of religious services. Among them were the *joshi*, the Brahman priest and astrologer, *gurav*, *thakur*, *koli*, *jangam*, and *mulana*.

In addition to these regular *balutedars*, there were several other artisans and professionals such as the coppersmith (*tambat*), the dyer (*rangari*), the oilman (*teli*), the metal-worker (*jingar*), the shepherd (*dhangar*), the betel-leaf dealer (*tamboli*), and the weaver (*vinkar*). They all served the village communities. They were called *alutedars*, getting payments in cash for their services. The shares of *alutedars* were determined by immemorial custom, and the cultivators paid them ungrudgingly.⁴⁵

In terms of 'castes', the people of Maharashtra could be divided into four major groups, namely the Brahmans, Marathas, Shudras or the untouchables, and the Adivasis who lived in the valleys, hilltops, and forests. The Muslims, who first came as traders, became rulers of some parts of Maharashtra and settled down in the country. With the advent of the Portuguese on the west coast, a new class of converts to Christianity emerged in the medieval period. Thus, Maratha society in the course of history became an admixture of the various sects of Hindus, Adivasis, Muslims, and Christians.

During the period of Shivaji, the Brahman caste with its main sub-castes, *deshastha* and *chitpavan*, dominated the social life of Maharashtra. A class of saint-poets and Varkaris arose in the medieval period, attacked the orthodoxy and the evil practices that had crept into the society, but did not preach abolition or overthrow of the existing caste system. Shivaji launched a political revolution, but did not make any efforts to change the traditional society. Brahmans enjoyed many social privileges, and performed several duties required for the spiritual side of life of the members of the society. But for this work only the services of a handful of Brahmans were required. The rest of the Brahman community took to mundane activities, such as trading, banking, and even soldiery. They dominated the secretarial part of the administration from the village to the state level. Opportunities for them increased during the period of Shivaji. Out of eight ministers of his council, seven were Brahmans, including the chief minister. The only exception was that of the *senapati*. Thus, Brahmans enjoyed a high social, political and economic status as priests, administrators, and professionals.⁴⁶

Deshastha Brahmans were very prominent under Shivaji, but they were relegated to the background with the rise of the *chitpavan* peshwas. During the period of Shivaji, though the *varna* system was not abolished, the dominance of Brahmans was challenged, particularly by the advocates of *Bhakti*, and attempts were made to achieve social equality. Shivaji in his administration prized merit and talent. But under the peshwas, all high and low offices in the administration were appropriated by the Brahmans. The peshwa's court at Pune came to be known as '*Brahmani Daulat*'. Ranade remarks:

[A] general feature which distinguishes the first period under Shivaji and Shahu from the period which followed the establishment of Peshwa's power at Poona, relates to the fact that while most of the great military commanders in the earlier period were Marathas with the notable exceptions of the Peshwas themselves, the men who rose to distinction in the later half of the century were for the most part, Brahmans. . . . This infusion of the racial and caste element among the military leaders of the nation had disastrous effects. The Brahmans at this time came to regard themselves as a governing caste, with special privilege and exemptions which were unknown under the system founded by Shivaji.⁴⁷

The Marathas played a dominant role as fighters. They were divided into two sections. The first belonged to the ninety-six *kulas*, or Marathas of blue blood, who had their roots

in the old Rajput clans. They held high political and social status. They claimed to be Kshatriyas and derived their family names from the Rajput clans. This group considered itself to be a closed aristocracy, marrying only among themselves, and holding positions of hereditary chiefs over smaller or bigger areas. The second section of the Marathas was called the *kunbis*, derived from the Sanskrit *kutumbin*, that is, a householder. They were essentially agriculturists, though they also served as soldiers and fighters under the Marathas.

Shivaji made good use of both the sections of the Marathas in establishing his swaraj. The feudal lords like the Jedhes, Nimbalkars, Ghorpades, Mohites, and Shirkes, among many others, joined Shivaji's movement of swaraj. He drew his military strength mainly from the mawales, the kunbis of the Mawal region. In the north, particularly in the eighteenth century, the term 'Maratha' was used with reference to all the people of Maharashtra, irrespective of their caste distinctions. A new class of nobility emerged under the peshwas: the Shindes, the Holkars, the Pawars, the Gaikwads, the Dabhades, and many other Maratha families, who did not belong to the 'blue-blood' group, came into prominence. The Marathas in general held high positions, like the patil and the deshmukh in the village and district administration. They held large tracts of land in villages.

Next to the Marathas were traders and artisans, organized in separate castes. The Maratha community was not much involved in trading and commercial activities. This was done mainly by the banya hailing from Gujarat. The petty shopkeeper in the village was known as vani, and generally belonged to the Jain community. The carpenters, blacksmiths, potters, coppersmiths, oilmen, barbers, and fishermen, had their own castes, each with a sort of religious and moral government, conducted by the council of elders called *jatisabha*. The decisions of the jatisabha were binding on its members. A violation of the performance of religious and social rites of the caste was punished by excommunication.

The untouchables or the Shudras, included the *mahar*, *taral*, *manga*, and others performing menial jobs. The mahar enjoyed a higher status than the others as he was a watandar of the village community.⁴⁸ The taral was a messenger of the village government and the manga served as a watchman. 'Though Maratha society under the influence of Brahmanic culture, had adopted many of its concepts, caste-distinctions were not sharp and strict as in the north. The great peasant community despite its low standing in the social scale, held a dominant position and set the general tone of society'.⁴⁹

The holy men from the Muslim community received allowances for maintenance, and illumination and upkeep of mosques. The mulana, who used to take care of the mosque and burial ground of the Muslim community, was a balutedar and was entitled to all privileges of the village community. Whenever a new village was colonized, special quarters for Yavanas (Muslims), were provided on the outskirts of the village, including land for building a mosque called the *shunyalaya*, 'abode of nothing'.⁵⁰

The Adivasis, the original inhabitants of Maharashtra, are still found in the forests and hill tracts of Sahyadri, Satpuda and Gondvan divisions of Maharashtra. Identified as Mahadev Kolis, Warlis, Kinkanas, Thakars, Katkaris, Bhils, Gavits, Dubalas, Dhankas, Andhas, Gonds, Korkus, Kolams, Pardhans, and Halbas, they are spread over the Thana, Dhulia, Ahmadnagar, Pune, Raigad, Nasik, Amaravati, Yavatmal, Chandrapur and Gadchiroli districts of modern Maharashtra. It is estimated that there were forty-four *jamatis* of Adivasis; they had a common heritage of social, cultural, and economic life with minor differences. They worshipped the sun, moon, clouds, lightning, trees, lions, tigers, scorpions, etc. Besides this, they worshipped a number of deities and evil spirits, which they took from others. Their *guru* or chief leader, *bhagat*, prescribed measures to avoid natural calamities. The Adivasis were very fond of liquor and used it

freely in all their festivals and ceremonies. They had their own types of dance, music, and painting.⁵¹

The attitude of toleration and cordial relations among religious communities and sects continued in the post-Shivaji period when the Brahmans became prominent. According to a list of religious places in Pune prepared in 1811, there were ten Muslim pirs entitled to a grant from the state. The two well-known dargahs, Elder and Younger 'Shaikh Salla', received protection from the state. The Hindus participated on a large scale in the urs of Shaikh Salla. It is estimated that more than 150 *taboots*, bearing names of different dignatories, participated in the procession of Muharram during the last phase of the Maratha rule. The 'Konkani Muslims' were of two types: *jamatis* or the pure Muslims, and *daldis* or Indian converts to Islam, who were essentially fishermen. The Muslim community of Konkarn was associated mainly with maritime activities. They were called *navayats*, meaning the newly arrived. Muslims who had permanent interests in the country studied the Hindu religious literature and mixed freely with the natives. They did not interfere with the religious and social life of the people.⁵²

The Portuguese, who replaced the Muslim rule in Konkarn, particularly in Goa in the early sixteenth century, brought along with them their own religion—Christianity. They adopted a policy of conversion of the local people to Christianity on a large scale, as it was a political necessity for them. C.R. Boxer has aptly remarked that 'the Portuguese overseas empire was a military and maritime enterprise cast in an ecclesiastical mould'. The method adopted by them for promoting Christianity alienated them from the local people and disturbed the social fabric in the Konkarn area.⁵³

IV

Both European and Indian historians have expressed divergent views about the purpose, ideology, or nature of the Maratha state in general and of Shivaji's state in particular. Shivaji, according to Vincent A. Smith, was a 'robber chief who inflicted untold misery on hundreds and thousands of innocent people, Hindus and Mohamedans alike, merely for the sake of gain, using without scruple all kinds of cruelty and treachery to attain his wicked ends'.⁵⁴ Jadunath Sarkar, who looks upon Shivaji as 'the most constructive genius of mediaval times', discerns no political ideal behind the foundation of the Maratha state; the cohesion of its people was not organic but artificial, accidental, and precarious. It had the characteristics of a 'war-state' and its economic development was neglected.⁵⁵ But the administrative and economic policies of Shivaji clearly show that the state he founded was not a 'war-state'. Nor did he neglect economic development altogether. Shivaji never made his state a personal affair; he always depended on the institutions he had created. On the eve of his death he could say with confidence that his kingdom would be recovered by 'these three Brahmans (Nilo Pant, Prahlad Pant, and Ramachandra Pant) and these three Marathas (Santaji, Bahirji Ghorpade, and Dhanaji Jadhav)'.⁵⁶

Irfan Habib has stated that there would be 'no greater mistake than to consider Shivaji and the Maratha chiefs as conscious leaders of a peasant uprising'. Furthermore, 'the fiscal and political practices of the Marathas bore the deeper imprint of their zamindari origins'.⁵⁷ Habib has based his arguments mainly on John Fryer's travelogue and the *Ahkam-i Alamgiri*. His inference does not appear to be applicable to the Maratha state under Shivaji. Wink has misunderstood the Marathi sources and his assertion that Shivaji's swaraj was nothing but the replica of watan, is flawed at the source.⁵⁸ Most historians

have failed to make a distinction between the state of Shivaji and the post-Shivaji Maratha states.

The character of the Maratha state began to change with the enthronement of Sambhaji. He suspected that some of the main colleagues of Shivaji were plotting against him in favour of his brother Rajaram. He therefore threw some important people into prison, and the reins of administration were entrusted to Kavi Kalash, a Kanoj Brahman who was an outsider. Sambhaji did not get the same devoted services from the Maratha sardars as they had given Shivaji. Aurangzeb took advantage of this situation, captured Sambhaji, and put him to death in 1684. Rajaram was a weak ruler. He escaped to distant Jinji in the south, entrusting the administration to Ramachandra Pant Amatya with the new designation of *hukumat panah*. With the help of the other ministers, Shankaraji Sachiv and Pratinidhi, Ramachandra tried to defend the Maratha state against Mughal inroads. He induced many Maratha sardars to regain lost territories by promising them land grants and other rewards in proportion to their services. This was a major departure from the policy of Shivaji. During the period of Rajaram the functioning of the council of ministers and the system of assigning jagirs for services was re-introduced.

The death of Aurangzeb in 1707 gave a new turn to the Mughal-Maratha relationship. Shahu, son of Sambhaji, was released from the Mughal camp, but his return to the homeland was received with mixed feelings. Tarabai, the dowager queen, wanted her infant son Shivaji II (whom she had installed on the throne after the death of Rajaram in 1700 and assumed the role of regent) to be recognized as the ruler of the Maratha state, which she had rescued from the clutches of the Mughals. With the arrival of Shahu, therefore, there ensued a state of civil war in Maharashtra, which led to the establishment of two centres of power: Satara, with Shahu as its head, and Panhala, with Shivaji II as its head. With the premature death of Shivaji II in 1712, Rajasbai, the second wife of Rajaram, put forward the claims of her son Sambhaji to the Panhala throne, set Tarabai aside, and shifted the capital of the new state to Kolhapur, constantly demanding an independent status for this new *gaddi* of the Chhatrapati. This was finally conceded by Shahu in 1731 by the Treaty of Warna. After settling the disturbed situation in the Maratha country, Shahu entrusted the affairs of the state to his peshwas.

Balaji Vishwanath Bhat (1713–20), the first peshwa appointed by Shahu, strengthened his position as the real successor of the state founded by Shivaji. One of his major achievements was acquisition of the three famous sanads of swaraj, chauth, sardeshmukhi, and *babati* from the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah. To some historians, the three sanads were the instruments through which Maratha supremacy was re-established; to others they were the shackles of slavery as they acknowledged the supremacy of the Mughal emperor, reducing independence to a kind of 'dominion status'.⁵⁹

Balaji Vishwanath strengthened the position of Shahu by winning over many Maratha sardars from Tarabai's party, including Dhanaji Jadhav and Kanhoji Angre, among others. He soon realized, however, that Shivaji's system could not work in the new historical situation. He, therefore, thought that it was necessary to accept the independence of the warlords who had emerged during the period of Maratha struggle for independence (1689–1707). Their land grants were made hereditary, and they were confirmed as independent chiefs in their jagirs on the condition that they would come forward with their forces during the period of crisis and fight for their overlord, the Chhatrapati Shahu. He assigned spheres of influence to each of the important chiefs. They were authorized to collect chauth and sardeshmukhi from the Mughal areas, and appropriate a major portion of these collections.

Balaji introduced certain new policies in administration by reorganizing the finances of the state. The state revenues were shared by the Chhatrapati and his feudatories who took the larger chunk of the revenues leaving only 34 per cent for the king. This policy, in effect, made the king virtually dependent on his feudatories. The jagir system became hereditary, a policy which had been scrupulously avoided by Shivaji. Indirectly, it sowed the seeds of disruption, and paved the way ultimately for the creation of a confederacy, which proved disastrous for Maratha solidarity in the course of time.

The next peshwa, Bajirao I, the son of Balaji, was hardly twenty years old when Shahu appointed him in place of his father. A very ambitious peshwa, Bajirao aimed at breaking the narrow limits of the Maratha power to strike at the roots of the crumbling Mughal empire. He pursued an aggressive policy of expansion in the north and hegemony in the south. He has been rightly considered as the founder of 'Greater Maharashtra'. His forward policy enabled the Maratha nobility to occupy prominent positions in Gujarat, Gwalior, Indore, Dhar, Malwa, and Bundelkhand.⁶⁰ In the south Bajirao humiliated Nizam ul-Mulk, the founder of the Asafjahi dynasty at Hyderabad, twice on the battlefields of Palkhed (1727–28) and Bhopal (1737–38). His total destruction was obviated perhaps by Shahu's policy of appeasement towards the Mughals.⁶¹ Before his death in April 1740, Bajirao had subdued the Deccan powers, become supreme in the Konkan, and prepared the ground for Maratha supremacy: 'he had both the head to plan and the hand to execute'.⁶² Peshwa Bajirao I (1720–40) became a leading feudal lord. His example was emulated by other ministers like the pratinidhi, the amatya, the sachiv, and the senapati who also became hereditary feudatories. Shahu was so overwhelmed with the achievements of the peshwas that he wrote two rescripts from his deathbed. By the first he gave supreme authority to the peshwa to carry on the government, and by the second he directed his successors to maintain the peshwa in power. In short, the Chhatrapati resigned royal authority and delegated it to the peshwa, virtually becoming a pensioner of the peshwa.

Balaji Bajirao, known as Nanasaheb, succeeded Bajirao as a matter of course and the office became hereditary in the Bhat family. Nanasaheb (1740–61) was not a soldier but a good administrator, having control over the finances of the state. He succeeded in restoring the image of the Marathas in the north, bringing Malwa, Bundhelkhand, and Jhansi under firm control. He planted the Shinde, Holkar, and Pawar sardars at various places in the north. Raghuji Bhonsle of Nagpur penetrated into Bengal and extended his sphere of influence to Cuttack and Lucknow. The instability in the Maratha country after Shahu's death (1749) gave Nanasaheb the opportunity to become the de facto ruler of the Maratha state. Pune virtually became the capital of the Marathas. He quarrelled with the Angres, the admirals of the Marathas, and ruined them with the help of the British. This impolitic act of the peshwa made the Marathas suffer in due course. Equally unfortunate was the third battle of Panipat (1761) in which the Marathas had to suffer a terrible loss in life, resources, and prestige. It took them years to restore themselves at Delhi. Nanasaheb could not recover from the shock and died in 1761 itself.⁶³

Madhavarao, the son of Balaji, became the peshwa at the young age of seventeen. He defeated Haider Ali and humbled the nizam of Hyderabad. He entrusted Mahadji Shinde and Malharrao Holkar with the management of the affairs of the North. Madhavarao achieved remarkable success in a short time, but he died in 1772 at the age of 28. 'The plains of Panipat were not more fatal to the Maratha Empire than the early end of this excellent prince'.⁶⁴

Madhavarao's brother Narayanrao succeeded him as peshwa, but the ambition of Raghunathrao resulted in his cruel murder in 1773. His posthumous son, Madhavrao II,

also known as Sawai Madhavrao, was made the peshwa by the Pune court. The management of the affairs of the state was entrusted to a council called the Barbhai Council, of which Nana Phadnis was the chief *karbhari* (manager) and Mahadji Shinde was the chief military leader. Just as earlier, the peshwas had usurped power from the Chhatrapati, so the karbharis now made the peshwa a titular head.

The peshwas could not wield power for a long time. Nana Phadnis appealed to the Maratha chiefs and, consequently, they became more independent, and started interfering in the peshwa's domain. There was no centralized authority to control the feudal states formed by the Maratha chiefs. For some time, the chiefs worked in the interest of the Maratha state, but when the power was shifted from the peshwa to the karbhari, the bond of union holding the Marathas under one banner practically vanished. Ranade refers to the change as 'the conversion of the organic whole into an inorganic mass'. He comments further that the 'experiment was doomed to ultimate failure, for it presupposed virtues which are not hereditary'.⁶⁵

The feudalization of polity weakened the financial position of the state. The policy of expansion added to its financial difficulties. The Maratha chiefs collected levies from their areas, but they did not regularly remit these to the state. The Peshwas had to borrow heavily to finance their conquests, and even to run the government. As Malcom remarked:

The constitution of the government and army of the Marathas was more calculated to destroy than to create an empire. The fabric had no foundation. The chiefs were from the first, almost equal, and as the armies they led, depended principally on success for pay, the leaders were necessarily invested with powers for the collection of tribute, or revenues, from the provinces into which they were sent. But though a share was claimed by Government, the application of the greater part in payment of his troops and the other expenses, raised the successful general into a ruler of the countries he had conquered.⁶⁶

The Maratha state founded by Shivaji, thus, underwent many changes in the subsequent period. His swaraj was a strong, well-knit monarchy of a unitary type. The king was the head of the civil and military administration of the state. The jagirdari system was incompatible with the strong monarchy created by Shivaji. He endeavoured to depart from the system and introduced the practice of direct payments to his civil and military officers, and not by assignments of revenue. The *saranjami* system of the Marathas hardly differed from the jagirdari system. The process of feudalization, thus begun in the Maratha country, reached its height during the eighteenth century under the peshwas.⁶⁷ The Maratha state became a confederacy, 'which was at once the strength and weakness of the Maratha power'.⁶⁸ A new class of Maratha nobility emerged as a result of the policy of expansion initiated by the peshwas. Several fief-holders posted at different places in the north and south to administer the new conquests became de facto rulers in due course. The most important among them were the Bhonsles of Nagpur, the Shindes of Gwalior, the Holkars of Indore, and the Gaikwads of Baroda.

V

The political process by which the Maratha chiefs established virtually independent states is not without interest. The survival of the Maratha states under British paramountcy was a logical sequence of their virtual independence. Raghuji, a leading member of the Bhonsle family, brought Nagpur under his control in 1735 and obtained a sanad from

Shahu to extend his sphere of influence over Lucknow, Murshidabad, Bengal, Bundhelkhand, and Allahabad. He agreed to pay about 900,000 rupees a year to the Pune government, and to raise troops for military service required by the peshwa. The growing power of Raghuji made the peshwa jealous of him. Taking advantage of the dispute among his sons on Raghuji's death in 1755, he reduced the power of the Bhonsles and made them accept his supremacy. Janoji Bhonsle, the successor of Raghuji, agreed to obey the peshwa as the head of the Maratha state, to serve him with his army, and to pay tribute to the Pune government. He also agreed not to conduct negotiations with any power without the peshwa's permission. Janoji died issueless, and his brother Sabaji did not survive long. His cousin Raghuji II came into conflict with the peshwa. By the Treaty of Deogaon (1803), Raghuji II lost Orissa and some other territories to the British, and a permanent resident was sent to his court. On his death in 1816, his nephew Appasaheb was obliged to accept the 'subsidiary alliance' against his will. In 1853 the state was annexed to the British empire.⁶⁹

Ranoji Shinde had joined Bajirao as an ordinary soldier to rise into eminence by sheer merit. He got saranjam from the peshwa, and shared with him the chauth and sardeshmukhi collected from Malwa from 1731 to 1745. His eldest son Jayappa succeeded to his *jagir*, worth 6,500,000 a year in the Malwa region. When Jayappa Shinde was treacherously murdered in 1755, the peshwa raised his son Jankoji to his *jagir*. Jankoji died fighting in the battle of Panipat. Mahadji Shinde took over the *jagir* in 1766, captured the fort of Gwalior, and made it his capital. Mahadji captured Delhi in 1771 and invited the fugitive Mughal emperor to the capital. He played a decisive role in the first Anglo-Maratha war as the adviser of Nana Phadnis. He obtained the executive authority of the Mughal empire as its *vakil-i mutliq* on behalf of the peshwa. He decided to restructure his army on the Western model, for which he secured the services of the French general De Boigne in 1784. Mahadji did not receive support from Pune and suspected that the Nana was no more friendly towards him. He defeated the Rohillas in 1788, and reinstated the emperor who confirmed his title of *vakil-i mutliq*. Mahadji was succeeded by his grandnephew Daultarao in 1794. He picked up a quarrel with Yashwantrao Holkar who defeated the combined forces of the peshwa and Daulatrao near Pune in 1802. The English defeated Daulatrao's army in the battles of Assay and Aragaon in 1803. Defeated also in the battles of Aligarh, Delhi, and Laswari in the same year, Daulatrao signed the Treaty of Sarje Arjangaon, ceding all his forts and territories between the rivers Ganga and Yamuna to the English. He signed another treaty in 1817, involving complete cooperation with the English, and died in 1827. Gwalior survived as a princely state under British paramountcy.⁷⁰

Malharrao Holkar had entered the service of Bajirao I in 1720 to become the commander of 500 horses within a year. He was appointed to the subha of Malwa in 1730 and authorized to collect chauth. He did not suffer much in the third battle of Panipat. He died in 1766 to be succeeded by his adopted grandson Malerao. His mother Ahalya Bai managed the affairs of the state from Maheshwar, near Indore. The forces of Indore took part in the campaigns of 1769–72 in Gujarat, Konkan, and Talegaon, the first Anglo-Maratha war, and the battle with Tipu Sultan in 1786. Defeated by the Shindes in the battle of Lakheri in 1793, Ahalya Bai died in 1795. The English declared war against Yashwantrao Holkar in 1804, and Lake destroyed his infantry, cavalry, and artillery. He was obliged to sign an agreement with the English in 1805 by which he was recognized as the legal ruler of the house of Holkars. But he died in 1811 to be succeeded by his infant son Malharrao. In 1818 he had to surrender most of his territories and to accept a 'subsidiary alliance'. The state became a feudatory of the British.⁷¹

Pilaji, the adopted son of Damaji Gaikwad, an associate of the Dabhades in Gujarat, was posted at Songarh near Surat. With the help of the local Bhils and Kolis, he marched on to Surat, defeated the Mughal governor, and started collecting chauth from the area. The Mughal governor Abhy Singh, who was jealous of the growing influence of Pilaji, got him murdered. Damaji, the son of Pilaji, defeated Abhy Singh in an open encounter near Baroda in 1734, and secured the rights of chauth over north Gujarat. With Damaji's dominance in Gujarat, Senapati Yashwantrao Dabhade was reduced to the level of a nominal leader. However, after Shahu's death in 1749, the peshwa imposed supremacy over Damaji Gaikwad obliging him to pay tribute and to join the peshwa in all his military operations in the north. Govindrao, the second son of Damaji, succeeded him with the prior consent of the peshwa, but failed to fulfil the conditions of the agreement. His younger brother Fateh Singh opened negotiations with the Pune government in favour of the claims of Sayaji, his eldest brother. The peshwa made him senakarte of Sayaji, and Govindrao retained the title of senakhaskhel, with a small jagir for his maintenance. Fateh Singh died in 1790 and was succeeded by his brother Manaji. When he failed to fulfil his promise, Govindrao was allowed to take possession of Gujarat. He agreed to surrender territory worth 1,400,000 rupees a year. Both Manaji and Govindrao died, and the latter's son Anandrao succeeded to the jagir of Gujarat. He was obliged to accept the 'subsidiary alliance' in 1802. Elphinstone entered into a new agreement with Sayaji Gaikwad in 1820, which made him a feudatory of the English.⁷²

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 A.R.Kulkarni, *Maharashtra in the Age of Shivaji* (Pune: Deshmukh, 1969), pp. 1-3.
- 2 The words of the Marathi language can be traced to several Prakrits, particularly Maharashtri. The beginning of the Marathi language can be traced to the fifth century. The first full sentence of the language appears in an inscription towards the end of the tenth century. Marathi literature of standard quality developed with the works of Mukundraj in the twelfth century and acquired perfection with the work of Jnaneshwar in 1290. The saint poets of Maharashtra used the language from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century.
- 3 James Cuninghame Grant Duff, *A History of the Mahrattas* (edited by S.M. Edwardes) (vols I & II) (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), pp. 68-72.
- 4 V.K. Rajwade (ed.), *Radha Madhav Vilas Champu* (Pune: Chitrashala, 1922), pp. 47-8.
- 5 Jadunath Sarkar, *House of Shivaji* (Calcutta: Sarkar and Sons, 1959 [3rd ed.]) pp. 26-76.
- 6 A.R. Kulkarni (ed.), *Jedhe Shakavali-Karnina* (Pune: Mansanman, 1999), p. 327.
- 7 Ibid., pp. 329, 330. Rajwade looks upon Shahji as the predecessor of Shivaji's *swaraj*: *Radha Madhav Vilas Champu*, p. 36. However, some scholars deny this credit to Shahji and consider Shivaji as the spontaneous leader of the Marathas, who alone was responsible for the rise of Maratha power (for example, N.R. Phatak, *Marathi Itihas Vyakhyan Mala* (vol. II) (Kolhapur: Shivaji Vidyapeeth, 1972) p. 12. It may be added that M. G. Ranade tries to establish a close relationship between the emergence of the Maratha power and the Bhakti movement of Maharashtra. He asserts that without understanding this relationship one may not fully understand the rise of Maratha power in its proper perspective. M.G. Ranade, *Rise of the Maratha Power* (Bombay: Bombay University, 1961), p. 78.
- 8 A.D. Marathe (ed.), *Rajkosh* (Introduction by Setu Madhava Pagadi) (Thane: Surya Marathe, 1986), pp. 12-21.
- 9 A.R. Kulkarni, *Medieval Maratha Country* (New Delhi: Books & Books, 1996), pp. 141-2, 138-46.
- 10 S.V. Puntambekar (ed.), "A Royal Edict: Translation of Amatya's *Ajnapatra*" *Journal of Indian History* (vol. VIII) (Madras: 1929), pp. 14-25.
- 11 Sarkar, *House of Shivaji*; V.G. Dighe and R.C. Majumdar (eds), *Maratha Supremacy (The History and Culture of the Indian People Series)*, (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, 1977), p. 586.
- 12 J.N. Sarkar, *Shivaji and His Times* (Orient Longman, New Delhi: 1973), p. 115.
- 13 S.N. Joshi (ed.), *Krishnaji Anant Sabhasad's Chhatrapati Shivaji Raje Yanche Charitra* (Pune: Chitrashala Prakashan, 1960), pp. 25, 26; A.R. Kulkarni, *Maharashtra in the Age of Shivaji*, pp. 148-50.

- 14 Kulkarni, *Maharashtra in the Age of Shivaji*, pp. 149–50; Joshi (ed.), *ibid.*, p. 26.
- 15 Kulkarni, *ibid.*, pp. 150–2. Jervis, a British officer, mentions that the bigha of the Konkan was the largest measure, where an allowance was made of three pands in every twenty pands, and thus the quantity in a bigha was twenty-three pands. A pand was equal to twenty kathis in length and one in breadth. The surveyor often measured the land with a movable or leaping or jumping kathi called *chalati kathi*, which also increased the actual area of land in a bigha. *Weights, Measures and Coins of India* (Bombay: American Mission Press, 1834).
- 16 Kulkarni, *Maharashtra in the Age of Shivaji*, p. 153. Balkrishna describes Annaji's settlement as settlement by the people: *Shivaji the Great* (vol. IV) (Bombay: Taraporwalla, 1922), p. 109.
- 17 Kulkarni, *ibid.*, pp. 153–77.
- 18 *Ibid.*, pp. 160–64.
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 203.
- 20 *Ibid.*, pp. 204–6.
- 21 Puntambekar, *A Royal Edict*, p. 31.
- 22 *Ibid.*, pp. 31–2; B.G. Paranjpe (ed.), *English Records on Shivaji* (Pune: Shiva Chaitra Karyalaya, 1931), vol. I, pp. 23, 318–320; vol. II, p. 40.
- 23 Kulkarni, *Maharashtra in the Age of Shivaji*, pp. 219–23.
- 24 Paranjape, *English Records on Shivaji*, vol. I, pp. 350–54; vol. II, p. 46.
- 25 Kulkarni, *Maharashtra in the Age of Shivaji*, pp. 223–9.
- 26 Paranjape, *English Records on Shivaji*, vol. I, pp. 350–54; vol. II, p. 46.
- 27 Kulkarni, *Maharashtra in the Age of Shivaji*, pp. 105–37.
- 28 Kulkarni, *Medieval Maratha Country*, pp. 143–5.
- 29 R.V. Herwadkar (ed.), *Sapta Prakarnatmak Charitra of Shivaji* (by Malhar Ramrao Chitnis) (Pune: Venus, 1967), pp. 232–3.
- 30 Joshi, *Krishnaji Anant Sabhasad's Chhatrapati Shivaji Raje Yanche Charitra*, pp. 25, 26.
- 31 Kulkarni, *Maharashtra in the Age of Shivaji*, pp. 173–6.
- 32 Joshi, *Krishnaji Anant Sabhasad's Chhatrapati Shivaji Raje Yanche Charitra*, p. 24.
- 33 Kulkarni, *Maharashtra in the Age of Shivaji*, pp. 176–85.
- 34 Joshi, *Krishnaji Anant Sabhasad's Chhatrapati Shivaji Raje Yanche Charitra*, pp. 54, 97–100; Jadunath Sarkar, *Shivaji and His Times* (Orient Longman, 1973 [reprint]), pp. 359–60.
- 35 Duff, *History of Marathas*, (vol. I), pp. 175–6.
- 36 Sabhasad describes Shaista Khan's camp as a huge city. Joshi, *Krishna Anant Sabhasad's Chhatrapati Shivaji Raje Yanche Charitra*, p. 28.
- 37 Kulkarni, *Maharashtra in the Age of Shivaji*, pp. 183–4.
- 38 Puntambekar, *A Royal Edict*, p. 38.
- 39 Joshi, *Krishnaji Anant Sabhasad's Chhatrapati Shivaji Raje Yanche Charitra*, pp. 100–195.
- 40 Dighe and Majumdar, *Maratha Supremacy*, p. 566.
- 41 Puntambekar, *A Royal Edict*, p. 48.
- 42 Dighe and Majumdar, *Maratha Supremacy*, pp. 566–7.
- 43 Quoted, Kulkarni, *Medieval Maharashtra Country*, p. 41.
- 44 Kulkarni, *Maharashtra in the Age of Shivaji*, pp. 24–6.
- 45 *Ibid.*, pp. 46–8. For more detail, A.R. Kulkarni, *Maharashtra Society and Culture* (New Delhi: Books & Books, 2000), pp. 1–62.
- 46 Kulkarni, *Medieval Maharashtra*, pp. 162–72.
- 47 *Miscellaneous Writings of the Hon'ble Justice M.G. Ranade* (Bombay: Manoranjan Press, 1915) pp. 347–8.
- 48 A.R. Kulkarni, 'The Mahar Watan: A Historical Perspective', in Meera Kosambi (ed.), *Intersections: Socio-Cultural Trends in Maharashtra* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2000), pp. 121–40.
- 49 V.G. Dighe, *Gazetteer of Maharashtra* (Bombay: Govt. of Maharashtra, 1967), p. 218.
- 50 Kulkarni, *Medieval Maharashtra*, p. 39.
- 51 G.S. Pandit, 'Adivasi Jeevan an Sahita', *Hakara*, January–March 2000, Pune, pp. 3–22.
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- 53 *Ibid.*, pp. 121–3.
- 54 V.A. Smith, *Oxford History of India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1920), p. 436.
- 55 Sarkar, *Shivaji and His Times*, pp. 373–82. *Krieg-Staat* is a government that lives and grows only by wars of aggression.
- 56 S.N. Sen, *Shiva Chhatrapati* (translation of Sabhasad and Chitnis *bakhars*), (Calcutta: K.P. Bagachi, 1977), p. 151; Joshi, *Krishnaji Anant Sabhasad's Chhatrapati Shivaji Raje Yanche Charitra*, p. 109.

- 57 Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India* (Bombay: Asia, 1963), p. 347.
- 58 Andre Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1986), pp. 186–90.
- 59 G.S. Sardesai, *New History of the Marathas* (vol. II), (Bombay: Phoenix Publications, 1958), p. 53, quoting Sir Richard Temple who describes these sanads as 'the most noteworthy state documents in Indian History which constituted the Magna Carta of the Maratha Dominion'. T.C. Shejwalkar, *Nizam Peshwe Sambandha* (Pune: Pune University, 1963), pp. 22–3; Dighe and Majumdar, *Maratha Supremacy*, pp. 59–60.
- 60 V.G. Dighe, *Peshwa Bajirao I and Maratha Expansion in the North* (Bombay: Karnataka Publishing House, 1994), pp. 85–103.
- 61 C.K. Srinivasan, *Peshwa Bajirao I* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1961), pp. xii–xiii.
- 62 Duff, *History of Marathas* (vol. I), pp. 359, 412–19. Richard Temple says, 'He died as he had lived in camp under canvas among his men and he is remembered to this day among the Marathas as the fighting Peshwa or incarnation of Hindu energy'; *Oriental Experience*, vol. I, p. 39, (London: J. Murray, 1883).
- 63 Sardesai, *New History of the Marathas*, pp. 474–7.
- 64 Ranade, *Rise of Maratha Power*, pp. 6–7.
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- 67 Dighe and Majumdar, *Maratha Supremacy*, pp. 225–30.
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- 69 Dighe and Majumdar, *Maratha Supremacy*, pp. 239–49.
- 70 A.R. Kulkarni and G.H. Khare (eds), *Maharathyancha Itihas* (vol. III) (Nagpur: Continental Prakashan for Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Grantha Nirmitti Mandal, 1986), pp. 465–8; Dighe and Majumdar, *Maratha Supremacy*, pp. 251–67.
- 71 Dighe and Majumdar, *ibid.*, pp. 267–78; Kulkarni and Khare, *ibid.*, pp. 429–39.
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CHAPTER 17

State and Society in Medieval Rajasthan

Dilbagh Singh

The view that political formation in Rajasthan displayed certain distinctive features has been entertained by many scholars, but seldom explicitly stated. The widespread prevalence of aridity, long continuous history of Rajput domination, and the low techno-economic dynamism of dryland agriculture have all created a distinctive image of Rajasthan. The early medieval period witnessed the emergence of a number of powerful Rajput clans that held sway in different territorial segments of the region. Deeply set in the minds of historians of all hues is the association of medieval Rajasthan with the Rajputs. This image is so deeply seated that one tends to overlook the history of pre-Rajput ruling tribes of Rajasthan. In bardic accounts of Rajputs, the Bhil, Meena, and Med tribal chiefs are referred to as thakurs, *chaurasias*, and big *bhomias*. Subjugating the tribal chiefs had been an essential stage in the emergence of Rajput polity in various parts of Rajasthan.

The whole question of the emergence of Rajput polity in Rajasthan becomes more complicated when we keep in view the shifting political jurisdictions with indefinite political boundaries of the region. Political space was created in a variety of ways and differentiated from one type to another. In the context of the processes of state formation and the structure of Rajput polity, an understanding of the perception of space and territorial composition of a clan-dominated state becomes highly relevant.

An analysis of the nature, organization, and distribution of power with particular emphasis on the formation of clan lineages is highly desirable for a clan-dominated region like Rajasthan where distribution of authority in the medieval period was organized on the basis of the network of clan lineages within the framework of the monarchical form of polity. What was the pattern of the formation and mobilization of lineage power and its relationship with the core? In the clan state of medieval Rajasthan the trend was towards the parcellization of the clan-dominated territory into strongholds of several lineages, with significant political and economic implications for the state structure.

To analyse political processes it is also necessary to juxtapose the local and supra-local polities. This aspect is particularly important if we consider the long continuity of rule by diverse Rajput clans since the early medieval period. This also raises the question of elements

of continuity and change in the political formation and state structure as a result of historical change that might have given a new dimension to the existing state structure. This at any rate was the case after the political incorporation of Rajput clan states into the Mughal empire during the sixteenth century when the Mughal concept of watan was superimposed on the clan-dominated Rajput monarchies.

I

For a clearer understanding of the process of the emergence of Rajput polity and its structure in medieval Rajasthan, it is imperative to examine the perception of space in the context of the connotation of some common terms used in medieval Rajasthani sources concerning space in a variety of contexts. Also, there is a conscious attempt in the sources to relate certain terms to particular political meanings although the meaning itself is not always fixed. Another problem relates to the manner in which specific terms like *utan* (watan), *thakurai*, and *bhom* were used to denote territorial concepts and space units without referring to fixed place names. However, the same terms did have association with place names. Third, wherever there are references to large territorial units, attempts are also made to incorporate smaller units into them using identical terminology.²

The general impression that we gather from our sources regarding the notion of territory in the context of polity and society is that the notion was highly differentiated and perceived as corresponding to different social and political spheres. There are, for instance, two distinct types of *des*. The first type is perceived as inhabited space identifiable with a region, sub-region, or a monarchical settlement of a particular caste, clan, or tribe who may or may not have exercised political dominance.³ There are innumerable *des* names in the sources such as Chittor *des*, Jaisalmer *des*, Bikipur *des*, Gujrat *des*, Mandu *des*, Pokaran *des*, and Patshahi *des*, referring to geographical regions, sub-regions, and monarchies; Songara ro *des* and Chandrawata ro *des*, identified as clan dominated settlements; *kadim* *des* or ancestral place of settlement; *nava khata* *des* or recently conquered or adopted *des*; Bhadana, Saran *Jaton ra* *des* identifiable as a pastoral-cum-peasant settlement belonging to Saran sept of the Jats. These terms do not exhaust the vocabulary applicable to space. Other terms that occur in our sources are *mewas*, *thakurai*, *chaurasi* and *bhom*, universally applicable to both Rajput clan-dominated and tribal settlements. At times these terms are associated with fixed name places or settlements specific to a clan or tribe. Thus, we have references to *mewas* of the Kolis, big *mewas* of the Bagri Rajputs in Nagor *des*, *thakurai* of the Bhils, Nadol, *thakurai* of the Sonigara Rajputs, Chhapar, Mohil Chauhan's *thakurai*, Dungarpur, Dungar Bhil's *thakurai*, Khed, big *thakurai* of the Gohil Rajputs, Maroth, *bhom* of the Gaur Rajput clan, *basi* and *guda* of members of the clan lineage, and so on. In contradistinction to the term *des* constituting different clannish and tribal settlements the term *khali des* is also widely used in our sources, not necessarily signifying an uninhabited living space or forest. The term *khali des* pointed to yet unoccupied and uncolonized space, but potentially a colony.⁴ There are references to the occupation and colonization of Phalodi, a *khali des*, by Nara, the son of Rao Suja Rathor of Jodhpur. Similarly Merta, designated as a *khali des*, was granted by Rao Jodha of Jodhpur to two of his sons Duda and Bir Singh who captured and colonized it with the help of the Jat chaudharis from the adjacent areas. He granted Jangal *des* to his son Bika. The transformation of *khali des* into a clan *thakurai* or monarchy also implied its colonization, thereby changing the whole connotation of the term. The problem also arose from the ambiguity of *khali des* as a grant, conquered territory, or colonized tract through simple occupation.⁵

The process of colonization necessitated some kind of understanding with other social groups whose migration was required to effect agrarian colonization and to create administrative infrastructure. This process led to the emergence of a number of smaller units within the initially undifferentiated space carved out as a petty clan monarchy. These smaller units are variously termed as *thakurai*, *bhom*, *guda*, and *basi*. Similarly, the varying meanings of certain terms like *thakurai* as a monarchy, a vassalage, a *zamindari* would thus be understandable only with reference to the context in which the term occurs. Of much greater frequency are references to *des*, *thakurai*, and *watan*, at times used interchangeably, but also carrying different connotations.⁶ Since these terms embodied contesting perceptions, further clarification of their usage is called for.

These terms were not necessarily immutable or fixed categories. The nature of Rajput clan polity, its actual functioning and the forces of historical change resulted in the fragmentation of a *des* or *thakurai*. The mutation of a *des* or *thakurai* led to the development of varying notions of *des* on the part of different members of the clan lineage who controlled its various segments. This can be seen from such references as *Salumbar*, the *watan* of *Chandrawats*, *Mewal* the *watan* of *Sisodia Sarangdeo*, *Biramji's guda*, *Jaita's basi*, and *Chhaju Chandrawat's bhom*.⁷ A *thakurai* not perceived as monarchy could transform itself into a clan-ruled monarchy and this process could be reversed as a result of the fragmentation of territory with the passage of time, the monarchy being reduced to *thakurai* or *zamindari* units. The process is very well illustrated by the instance of *Mohil Chauhan*, who conquered *Chhapar des* and transformed his *thakurai* into a *raj*. Subsequently, *Mohil's raj* got divided into sixteen *thakurai* units following the custom of *bhaibant*.⁸ The mutability of clannish monarchical *thakurai* is further evident from the instance of *Bagar des* in south Rajasthan with *Dungarpur* as its nodal point. At a late stage the *thakurai* was equally divided between *Rawal Jagmal* and *Rawal Prithvi Raj*, leading to the emergence of a new monarchical *thakurai* with *Banswara* as its nodal point or *rajthan* (capital). Thus the terms *des*, *watan*, or *thakurai* did not necessarily refer to a rigidly uniform kind of territorial unit, nor was it unchanging in character. Another form of *des* hierarchy is also noticeable in our sources, which is perceived in terms of certain specific topographical features associated with a particular tract of land within a *des* or a node in a cluster of settlements. Thus, we may refer to two tracts of land termed as *kharad des* in *Jaisalmer des* and *Bikpur des* in *Jaisalmer* or *Amad*, a big *des* in *Mandu des*.⁹ These references also indicate the process in which an hierarchy of *des* could be perceived. Some of the smaller *des* units perceived as a part of the larger *des* preceded the latter as in the case of *Jaisalmer*, which comprised *Bikpur des* existing much before the settlement of *Jaisalmer*.¹⁰ *Pargana Antari* in *Amad des* is identified as a *des* and big *thakurai* lying in *Mandu*. *Rawat Shiv* is referred to as the *thakur* and *Chandrawats* as the *bhomias*. *Anteri* is mentioned as a petty monarchy of the *Chandrawat* sub-clan of the *Sisodias*.¹¹ The suffix *des* may have continued to denote a settlement that changed its political character owing to convergence of different historical factors. The entire question of the hierarchy of *des* becomes more complicated when we are considering a region of shifting political boundaries, often with indefinite or non-existent (*khali des*) jurisdiction. We witness a variety of ways in which the notion of *des* was created and differentiated from one type to another.

There are two other aspects of *des* that need to be clarified. The first relates to it as a space and we have already noted different connotations of *des* as a peasant-cum-pastoral settlement, a tribal, or clan settlement with or without any recognizable political power, unsettled but defined space, and well-established monarchies of varying statures. Although a *des* is identified in terms of geographical-cum-political unit and a specified clan-dominated

in initial territorial settlement, there could still be some confusion regarding the perception of a *des* or its spatial limits. All these confusing and conflicting perceptions are interestingly illustrated in attempts to pinpoint what the *des* of a Rajput Raja is, the clan lineage, and the entire clan. The other aspect relates to historical change that might have given a new dimension to the existing notions of *des*, as was the case after the political incorporation of Rajput clan states into the Mughal empire when the Mughal concept of *watan* was superimposed on the clan-dominated Rajput monarchies.

In fact, the problem of the definition of *des* in the context of Rajput clan polity continued even under the Mughals who merely resolved it to the extent of asserting their superior authority. They tried to understand this problem from the point of view of what the constituent units of a clan *des* were and what the relationship of individual clan lineage territorial settlements with their core was. The Mughal perception was not entirely divorced from the clanish notion of territory, which had an inbuilt provision for the emergence of segmented centres of authority within a clan-dominated territory. While resolving conflicts over this issue, the Mughal emperors at times sought advice from their trusted Rajputs regarding Rajput customary practices. Before rejecting Sabal Singh Rathor's petition requesting for a share in his father Raja Suraj Singh's patrimony (Jodhpur), Jahangir consulted Raja Bhim Sisodia of Mewar as to the Rajput custom governing such issues.¹³

Generally, a clan-dominated *des* was perceived as constituting *rajthan* or the core, *thakurai* of the clan lineage, *bhoin*, *guda*, and *basi* of the lesser-known members of the clan.¹⁴ The distinction between *rajthan* and *thakurai* of the clan lineage had important implications as it negated the possibility of clan territory being treated as a compact territorial unit. There is, however, a problem that concerns the relationship between the core and the *thakurai* in terms of the distribution of land and the pattern of authority, which could not invariably be identical and static, depending on the balance of power between the two and territorial resources available at any given period of time.¹⁵ The inherent rights of the clan lineage in the conquered and colonized territory formed the basis of political authority and distribution of resources. In this structure of polity the clan *des* could hardly be viewed as a cohesive territory with a centralized authority. For all practical purposes a clan *des* was an amalgamation of a number of miniature *desas*. This can be seen from references to Salumbar (in Mewar), Chudawata ra *des*, Merta, Merita Rathora ra *des*, and so on. Differentiation that existed in terms of territorial resources was based upon two interlocking systems: one on kinship and the other on the military might of individual members of the clan lineage.

The clan-ruled *des* by no means signified a fixed nodal place; the core area could shift from one place to another in periods of large-scale expansion. This point should underline the close linkage between the clan and the territory that came to be recognized as its domain, both in the immediate context and over time, and the pattern of relationship between the core or *rajthan* and the lineage segments. In order to get an insight into the this process we may refer to the Rathor clan state of Marwar as a case study.

II

The Rathor kingdom of Marwar came into existence towards the end of the thirteenth century according to tradition through the adventurous moves of Rao Asthan, son of Rao Siha of Kannauj, who had decided to migrate to western India to seek his fortune. He set off towards Gujarat with two of his brothers. While encamping near Pali, he protected the

Brahman traders of Pali and the chaudharis of nearby villages from the depredations of Kanha Med who held thakural over Pali. Initially, apart from receiving protection money from the traders, Authan obtained thakural (zamindari) of 50 to 60 villages from the chaudharis. He gradually built up a band of Rajput followers and acquired resources necessary for ruling Pali. Thereafter began the process of further conquest and colonization, which continued under Authan's successors at an uneven pace. In addition to acquiring Pali, Authan captured 140 villages belonging to Pratap Gohil, the ruler of Khed. He also acquired 280 villages around Khed. His successor Raipal is credited with having added 560 villages of Barmer by dislodging the Panwaris.¹³ Raipal's successors had a long drawn out conflict with Sonigara, Bhati, and Solanki Rajputs for fresh territorial gains. However, the process of territorial expansion was temporarily arrested due to the penetration of Alauddin Khalji in Rajasthan. Rao Mullinath continued the process of expansion. At this time the *des* or *watan* of the Rathors did not designate fixed political boundaries. It eventually designated the core area held by the clan, which changed from time to time in keeping with the direction in which new territorial acquisitions were made. The Gohils who were ousted from Khed went to Jaisalmer and ultimately carved out a new monarchy at Palitana in Saurashtra (Gujarat). Henceforth they came to be designated as Morvi Rao, and Palitana became their newly adopted *des*.¹⁴ In the case of the Rathors the *rajthan* was shifted from Pali to Khed by Authan himself, and later on to Maheba by his successors. Rao Mullinath made Salari his *rajthan*. When the Ida Rajput chief invited Rao Chunda to take over Mandor, the *rajthan* was once again moved. Ultimately it got shifted to Jodhpur by Rao Jodha.¹⁵ Even upto Jodha's time, Marwar *des* as such was not perceived as the *watan* or *des* of the Rathor clan. It was sparsely populated, having scattered Rajput settlements characterized as *chaurasis*.

Within Marwar we have references to the *chaurasis* of Ida, Sindhal, Sankhla, Kotecha, and Asayach clans of Rajputs. Operating from Mandor, Rao Chunda took control of the adjacent Nagor *des*. In this context, it is worth mentioning that a distinction was made between inherited territory (*bapoti*) and newly conquered or colonized land or *nava khata des* (newly earned territory). Rao Jodha is credited with having regained his *bapoti* Mandor from the Sisodias of Mewar, and captured Sojat and Jaitaran, forming part of Chittor (Mewar) *des*. The territory directly possessed by Jodha comprised Jodhpur, Merta, Sojat, Jaitaran, and Jangal *des*, with Jodhpur serving as the nodal point. This picture underwent a change when Jodha distributed lands among his brothers and sons. Two of his sons got Merta, Jangal *des* went to his son Bika, two other brothers were granted territory outside the clan domain, that is, Bhadravan, the *watan* of Sindhal clan, and Dronpur Ladana, the *watan* of Mohil Rajputs, which they had to conquer. His son and successor Rao Suja inherited Jodhpur, Sojat, and Jaitaran and subsequently acquired Phalodi and Pokaran which were colonized and controlled by two of his sons. Rao Ganga's *bapoti* was restricted to Jodhpur and Sojat, the rest of the *des* being possessed by clan lineage as their rightful share in the joint clan territory. Rao Maldeo who inherited Ganga's territory, pursued an expansionist policy both within the *des* as well as outside its bounds, and brought into sharp focus inherent conflicts in the perception of respective territorial rights of the ruler and clan lineage.¹⁶ The long drawn out tussle between Maldeo and those members of the clan lineage who asserted their independent territorial rights culminated in Sher Shah's attack on Marwar. The relationship based on the concept of shared access to clan territory was echoed in the following manner by the clan lineage: 'We including the Rao are the descendants of the same Rathor ruler and we owe our right to a share in the kingdom to the same person who had granted Jodhpur to the Raja.'¹⁷ That the clan lineage regarded the kingdom as belonging to the clan and not exclusively to the raja is also evident from the controversy

that cropped up between Maldeo and some of the Rathor lineage leaders just before the battle of Sumel. When Maldeo wanted the Rathor army to retreat from Giri, a village in pargana Jaitaran, a number of Rathor sardars including Rao Koopa and Jaita, refused to budge by retorting that the territory upto this point was conquered collectively by their ancestors; hence it belonged to the clan and not to Maldeo alone. They would not allow the invader to take up the clan territory.²⁰ The manner in which the right of the collectivity was asserted is also evident from Mewar. When Rana Amar Singh granted Begham to Ballu Chauhan, Rawat Megh Sisodia got so enraged that he questioned the Rana's authority to do so on the ground that the place in question belongs either to the Shaktawat or the Chandrawat sub-clan of the Sisodias and not to anyone else.²¹ Collective control of the clan lineage over the clan dominated territory is further evident from the fact that when Rawal Samar Singh of Chittor gifted the principality to his younger brother, the latter wanted his brother to get his decision endorsed by the clan lineage before accepting the gift.²²

It was not only the clan brotherhood that questioned Maldeo's authority to impose his own perception of the territorial rights of the collaterals, but also those who were holding charitable land grants were not prepared to accept the perception of the reigning monarch regarding land grants received from the previous regime. When Maldeo took possession of Nagor he desired that all existing land grants held by the Charans be treated as conferred by the present conqueror. However, the Charans could not be convinced. Their argument was that those grants had been made to their ancestors by other rulers, and it is not their problem to seek reconfirmation from successive rulers.²³ Maldeo did not press the matter any further, but his son and successor Mota Raja Udai Singh asserted his right to renew these grants afresh, which the Charans had been enjoying in parganas Sojat and Jaitaran prior to these falling under the control of the Rathor ruler. The protest movement launched by the Charans culminated in a mass suicide by them.²⁴

III

Against this background it would be interesting to examine the Mughal perception of the clan state, its bearing on the political integration of Rajput states, and the implications of the introduction of the Mughal system of mansab and jagir for polity in Rajasthan. The question is, what was the Mughal perception of the Rajput clan des? Did it consist of the core area in the possession of the raja or did it also include thakurai territories controlled by important clan leaders? In other words, did the Mughals differentiate between these two units? The other issue is whether the Mughal perception fully matched the Rajput perception; and, last, how can this issue be viewed in the context of the administrative reorganization of the territories brought under Mughal control, that is, the creation of the suba, sarkar, and pargana boundaries?

The term watan jagir is not used by any contemporary historian of Akbar's period. It was not even used by Abul Fazl. He calls the patrimonies *mautin*, *maskan*, *manzil*, *bungah*, *zamindari*, etc. At one place he refers to Jodhpur as Mota Raja's jagir without using any prefix to indicate the special nature of this assignment.²⁵ The term watan jagir was used for the first time in a very late farman of Akbar.

The institution of watan jagir that we come across in the seventeenth century was not visualized in all its features when the Rajputs entered Mughal service. What was the nature of their rights and privileges within their patrimony as well as in relation to other members of the clan lineage is not clear. The Mughal concept of watan jagir was primarily applicable

to those Rajput chieftains who were inducted into the Mughal imperial service as mansabdars. What criteria were applied to those Rajput chieftains who did not join the imperial service in defining their patrimony or hereditary dominion is not yet clear. This is an important area of investigation, but data for such an investigation are rather limited. We may restrict our discussion to the Rajput chieftains whose territories were designated as watan jagirs towards the end of Akbar's reign.

When a Rajput ruler accepted imperial service, he was given a jagir that in part consisted of the clan-dominated territory which was held directly by him, including the rajthan. These tracts theoretically formed the watan jagir. Part of the jagir granted in a clan-dominated area was temporary in nature. The Rajput notion of this jagir, whether held in hereditary possession or transferable, was the *patshahi* jagir held in des as against one that could be assigned in the patshahi des or outside the clan-dominated territory.²⁶ The grant of watan jagir or patshahi jagir in the des had significant implications for the clan-lineage thakurai, basi, bhom, and guda, for all these units were brought under the control of the grantee and the granting authority was an outside power. The territorial rights and authority of the clan lineage holding thakurai and exercising parallel sovereign rights were reduced to zamindari rights. However, the Mughals did not eliminate the practice of bhaibant: Akbar himself followed this practice with respect to pargana Jaitaran, which was assigned to Mota Raja Uday Singh in *shirkat* jagir (in part only). After Mota Raja's death his jagir villages in pargana Jaitaran were distributed among his sons. Merta, which Akbar had granted to Jaimal earlier, was equally apportioned between his sons Surtan and Kesho Das Merita in 1601. Second, the watan jagir was not treated by the Mughals as a fixed territory in all cases. The extent of the clan-dominated territory recognized as watan jagir varied from one Rajput state to another on political consideration. The extent of watan jagir held by Raja Rai Singh of Bikaner was much larger than one possessed by the rulers of Marwar. Third, the extent of jagir held even in the des fluctuated in accordance with the changes in the mansab held by the grantee.

When a raja died, all the parganas held by him in watan jagir with the exception of the core pargana or rajthan did not automatically pass on to his successor. The extent of his watan jagir depended upon his initial rank. Thus, in the case of Marwar, when Mota Raja Uday Singh was granted the *tika* in 1582, he got only pargana Jodhpur. Three more parganas in the des, that is, Siwana, Jaitaran, and Sojat, were granted to him subsequently. When Suraj Singh succeeded him in 1595 he received in watan only Jodhpur, Siwana, and Sojat. Five other parganas in the des, that is, Jaitaran, Phalodi, Sanchor, Jalor, and Merta, were assigned to him later as his mansab increased. His son Gaj Singh was granted Jodhpur, Jaitaran, Sojat, and Siwana in watan jagir. Phalodi was granted to his brother Sabal Singh in bhaibant jagir. When Jaswant Singh ascended the gaddi, he was given the mansab of 4,000 *zat* and *sawar*, and his watan jagir consisted of parganas Jodhpur, Siwana, Merta, Sojat, Phalodi, and Satalmer. He secured pargana Jaitaran on farming rights (*muqata*).²⁸

Phalodi, which used to be a *khali* des or unsettled territory, was occupied and colonized by Nara, the son of Rao Suja of Jodhpur. It continued to be under the possession of Jodhpur rulers till 1577. In 1578 the pargana was assigned in patshahi jagir to Raja Rai Singh of Bikaner, who held it till 1615. Next year it was transferred to Raja Suraj Singh and after two years assigned to Raja Sur Singh of Bikaner. Suraj Singh sent a petition to Jahangir for its restoration on the plea that this pargana was their *janambhom* (birth place). Subsequently, a farman was issued to this effect. Similarly pargana Sojat, which also formed part of Marwar des, kept on changing hands. Among others it was held in tankhwah jagir by Sakat Singh Sisodia for five years. It is evident from all these instances that the Mughals never treated

the Rajput state, des, or clan-dominated territory as a cohesive or compact territorial unit. Any number of parganas within the clan des, barring the rajthan, could be assigned in jagir to others. Pargana Nagor was assigned by Akbar to Rai Singh of Bikaner in 1570 and to Jagmal Kachhawa in 1573 who held it till 1586; thereafter it was assigned to Rao Dalpat of Bikaner, who was followed by Kunwar Jagat Singh Kachhawa, Rana Sagar, Madho Singh Kachhawa, Pathan Jaudin Khan, Sur Singh of Bikaner, Amar Singh Rathor of Jodhpur in 1638, Daulat Khan Kayamkhani in 1644, Rai Singh Rathor in 1668, and Sawai Jai Singh in 1723. The pargana was regained by the Jodhpur raja in 1751.²⁸ Pargana Dausa, which was conquered by Dulhe Rai, the founder of the Kachhawa principality of Amber, was possessed by Rao Rupsi Rajawat at the time of Bharmal's submission to Akbar. Rupsi retained Dausa as a jagir-cum-military charge assigned by the emperor.²⁹

In 1623 the whole of the Mughal suba of Ajmer was assigned to prince Parvez in jagir. Barring the rajthan or the core parganas of the Rajput chiefs, the entire territory passed into Parvez's jagir. Pargana Merta was sub-leased by the prince to Raja Suraj Singh of Marwar. In return for this favour, princess Manbhavati of Jodhpur was married to the prince.³⁰ After the death of Raja Ram Singh Kachhawa, the capital pargana Amber remained in the khalisa for three months, pending finalization of the mansab to be granted to his successor Raja Bishan Singh. He was subsequently required to deposit revenue proceeds of Amber with the imperial *karori* (revenue collector) for the aforesaid period.³¹

The concept of the Rajput clan state as a compact territorial unit with fixed boundaries, encompassing the entire clan-dominated area or what the clan perceived as the des, could not crystallize before the middle of the eighteenth century, coinciding with the decline of Mughal authority. It is also evident that the Mughals did differentiate between the core area and the territory under the possession of the clan leaders (thakurais) so that they could restrict the extent of the patrimony or watan of the Rajput raja to make him dependent upon the imperial grant of jagir in or outside the clan des. They further weakened the notion of patrimony by resorting, though selectively, to the principle of bhaibant, thereby retaining on the one hand a fairly strong local tradition and at the same time reinforcing the overarching supermacy of the Mughal state. While not resolving the basic contradiction inherent in the Rajput polity, they tried to strike a balance by treating only the rajthan as hereditary and non-transferable watan jagir, and making the rest of the clan-dominated territory an imperial territory for all practical purposes. Nonetheless, they acknowledged the superior rights of the dominant members of the clan. The position of the clan lineage was now undermined to the extent that its members were reduced to the status of mere zamindars.

The tradition of indefinite and ill-defined clan territorial jurisdiction was also kept alive by the Mughals. A dispute over the control of Pokaran between Jodhpur and Jaisalmer, which preceded the coming of the Mughals to India persisted till Shah Jahan's reign. It was finally resolved in favour of Jodhpur by Shah Jahan when princess Manbhavati, who was married to Parvez, took up the cause on behalf of her parental family. Responding to her appeal that Pokaran, despite its being assigned to the Jodhpur ruler in jagir, continued to be under the de facto control of the Bhatias of Jaisalmer, Shah Jahan offered her Jaisalmer if she so desired. But she restricted her family's claim to Pokaran by acknowledging that Jaisalmer, was the ancestral watan of the Bhatias and that the Rathors had nothing to do with it. Jaswant Singh took over Pokaran through military action with the tacit approval of the emperor.³² From this it may be inferred that the Rajputs had definite notion of what they considered as the des belonging to their own clan and what they perceived as that of other ruling clans. Despite all the limitations imposed by the Mughal paramount power,

the Rajputs never gave up their own notion of what they regarded as their own *des* or clan territory. The policy of territorial expansion pursued by the principal Rajput chieftains (holding *mansabs*) in the wake of the decline of the Mughal imperial authority can be appreciated against this background. Significantly, the conflicting perceptions of the respective territorial rights of the *raja* and clan lineage persisted down to colonial rule.

IV

The process of legitimization of the new local political formations and other ideological dimensions of the state, such as the nature of interdependence between temporal power and sacred authority, and popular perceptions of the state, are important issues to be explored for understanding the state and its character. The question of legitimacy, which has not yet been adequately addressed, needs to be examined beyond the state's concern for the appropriation and redistribution of surplus, and the maintenance of law and order. In the context of linkages between the state and society, issues like caste, class, and community identities, questions of vertical mobility, and regulation of social relations, and processes of assimilation and conflict resolution would lead to a better understanding of the state's functioning and the popular perception of the state as an abstraction.

Intervention by the state in social issues and disputes gives us a fairly comprehensive picture of what the state sought to uphold, what its moral and ideological values were, and which aspects of social norms and traditions it sought to preserve or change. All these have to be naturally seen in the larger context of the then prevailing social order and norms by examining the role of the state and the nature of its jurisdiction and intervention in the social life of individuals belonging to different castes and communities, with the objective of maintaining a stabilized hierarchical social order. The state also attempted to regulate social life in terms of interpersonal relationship within the family, caste, and community.

All castes and communities had their own *panchayats*. These were by and large autonomous bodies that regulated and monitored the social conduct of their respective members. Their jurisdiction extended to matters relating to the breach of caste regulations, marriage, adoption, inheritance, etc. They also functioned as bodies resolving intra-caste disputes.³³ It was only when they failed to resolve the issue to the satisfaction of the contesting parties that the intervention of the state was sought.³⁴ They constituted an intermediary institution between the state and numerous caste groups and communities. As there were no well-defined spheres of jurisdiction regarding these social matters, the state as well as the other social institutions that were caste and locality based played an important part in the regulation of such affairs.

The study of linkages between the state and society is related to the problems of the nature and organization of polity in a society in which there was no fundamental distinction between legislature, bureaucracy, and judiciary. The overarching bureaucratic structure of a centralized state may enforce customary laws as a concern solely of the administrative apparatus of the state. The notion of the essential autonomy of caste bodies and community institutions may perceive regulation of social affairs and norms as matters to be resolved at the level of these bodies. Empirical studies on the theme do not generally relate themselves to conceptual issues. There are other issues too that require probing as a prelude to new empirical work on the theme of state and society. One issue is the existence or absence of a uniform legal code that could be applied to different castes and communities, and could cover a wide range of offences that could be perceived as

deviations from expected social behaviour by any given society. Empirical evidence relating to how different castes and communities figure in actual cases of such violations can throw light on whether there was uniformity or diversity both in relation to the legal code and the application of the code for different castes and communities. It is unlikely that any attempt at codification could have covered the wide range of cases that the documents present, and it is therefore necessary to look at all recorded cases to come to an understanding of the concerns of society as well as that of the state, not according to any theoretical or legal text, but from the perspective of contemporary society. The key points for this enquiry are: what is the range of social affairs requiring intervention by the state? In other words, if they were considered social offences, being deviations from expected social behaviour, was there a necessary correlation between the nature of social stratification in contemporary society and the individuals or representatives of social groups who figure as offenders of social norms in the documents? What the documents offer are fascinating glimpses into the society of Rajasthan during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The evidence presented here comes from documents preserved in the Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner. For the purpose of detailed investigation, documents from eastern Rajasthan have been selected.

The Rajputs as a ruling group had their distinctive ethos, social organization, political ideas, and institutions. The Rajput state accorded a privileged position to the injunctions of the *dharmashastras* regarding all spheres of life. At the theoretical level this could mean giving due importance to the social and religious beliefs and practices of other castes and communities domiciled over centuries in Rajasthan. All customary laws, practices, rituals, rules, and regulations were respected and given the backing of the state. Diverse customary laws and established practices of the various communities as also the myriad castes and sub-castes were all recognized and enforced by the state. The state tried to regulate family life in the spheres of interpersonal relationship between different members of the family, family functions, and ceremonies, and rights and duties of the different members towards each other in order to preserve harmony in the basic social unit. A large number of contemporary documents dealing with various cases pertaining to family affairs show the nature of the state's intervention in family life and other related social matters. These cases deal mainly with offences committed against one member of the family by another: physical violence, excessive harassment caused to female family members resulting in suicide, thwarting the authority of elders or being disrespectful to them, altercation with other family members, false accusation of immoral activity, dereliction of duty or responsibility towards other family members, illicit relationship with a family member, and so on. All these affairs were considered to be within the jurisdiction of the state; violation of norms governing family life invited punishment. The state also intervened whenever petitioned by individual family members for sorting out grievances.

Challenging the authority of the elders of the family, altercation or argumentation with them was perceived to be violation of the code of conduct governing family life. This is evident from the instance of Kushal Chaudhari of qasba Todabhim who was punished by the state for insulting his mother. Deva Jat of village Morara in pargana Chatsu and Soma Regar of village Choru of pargana Fagi were punished for having altercations with their elder sisters-in-law. Khanu, a Muslim of qasba Malarna, defied the authority of his elder brother and had to pay a fine. Sekha Regar of qasba Naravana was punished for fighting with his father. Similarly, Bulla Bhangari of qasba Malpura, who used to quarrel with his grandfather over the issue of ownership of the field, was punished by the state. The elder members of the family could also be punished for unbecoming behaviour towards younger

ones. This is evident from the instance of Khema Mahajan of qasba Udehi who was punished on the charge of having an altercation with his niece. The state took punitive action in all cases irrespective of the caste, community, or status of the offenders.³⁵

The state also took a serious view of ill-treatment of wives by their husbands and took requisite action against the erring spouse and other members of the family. Naga Khati of village Nagor in pargana Malpura was punished for beating up his wife without any provocation. Nathu Meena of village Karath in pargana Bahati was fined for scolding his wife. Action was taken against Baksha Mahajan and Ganga Ram Joshi of qasba Tadabhim, Abhay Chamar of village Dera in pargana Gazi Ka Thana, and Naron Chhipa of qasba Chatu when it was reported that they were guilty of physically assaulting their wives. An aggrieved wife also could directly petition to the state against her erring husband. Sabhya Gujar of village Manoharpur in pargana Nisai was punished when his wife requested that action be taken against her erring husband. Despite her low-caste status, Karim Dad weaver's wife had the guts to represent to the state that she had been abandoned by her husband without any reason. Discord among family members at times took a serious turn, culminating in attempts to commit suicide, particularly by the female members—a wife, mother, sister, daughter, or daughter-in-law. It was obligatory on the part of the family of the victim, as also the local authority, to report such occurrences to the state, and have appropriate action taken against the defaulter. Thus, when Jeesa Koli's mother was provoked by her daughter to the extent that in a fit of anger she consumed poison, her life was saved and action was taken against the daughter for driving her mother to this drastic step. The state took action against Abhay Ram Meena whose high-handedness forced his daughter to give up her life by jumping into a well. Khushal Koli quarrelled with his mother, whereas Bhika Jat's mother-in-law quarrelled with him. In both cases the mother and the mother-in-law reacted by jumping into a well. Shobha Meena's wife was constantly intimidated by her family, as a result of which she attempted to commit suicide. Mana Jat's unbecoming behaviour with his brother's wife led to her jumping into a well.³⁶

It was not only the husband who was accused of violence against his spouse, but other members of the family too could be found guilty of committing atrocities upon the daughter-in-law and sister-in-law. This is evident from several instances recorded in the documents where the state intervened and initiated punitive action against those who perpetrated these atrocities. In village Trisul of pargana Todabhim, Ajmeri Nai cut off his wife's nose. Kanha Dube of qasba Lahot committed the same crime against his daughter-in-law. Luna Chhipa of village Roopvas assaulted his daughter-in-law for which he was punished. The state took a serious view of the act of violence committed by Chhaju Brahmin of qasba Dausa against his brother's wife, which led to the termination of her pregnancy. The state also took action against the head of the family for not taking proper care of his mentally retarded daughter-in-law who died by jumping into a well; Deepa Nilgar, her father-in-law, was held responsible for negligence. Unable to put up with harassment caused by her mother-in-law, Ghazi Chhipa's wife requisitioned the services of Swami Bihari Das to bewitch her mother-in-law. Both were declared guilty by the state. Strict action was also taken by the state against those family members who falsely accused others of adultery. Uda Bhand of village Raipur Jat in pargana Hindon was punished by the state for accusing his brother's wife of adultery but failing to prove it.³⁷

Violation of the code of conduct for widows belonging to the upper castes was considered to be a serious offence. Even the killing of a widowed daughter by her father was treated as a less serious crime. Balkishan Vyas of village Thalheta in pargana Dausa confessed that he had killed his widowed daughter because of her misconduct. The state took more

serious view of the fact that this matter was not reported than the act of killing itself. The state upheld the norms of the caste with regard to right to property in the family, including its female members. When it was brought to the notice of the state that Ganga Ram Chhipa of qasba Chatsu intimidated his daughter-in-law, forcing her to part with her ring and necklace without the consent of the panchas, the erring father-in-law was punished.³⁸

The state's intervention in regulating social life outside the sphere of the family is evident from its attempt to uphold the notion of honour and self-respect of individuals without any bias in favour of gender, caste, community, and status. With regard to protecting the honour of women, the state took action against those who tried to outrage the modesty of women. Sada Brahman of village Sakhinu in pargana Tonk was punished for touching the wife of a Meena. Uda *patwari* of village Vad Ka Para in pargana Lalsot held the hand of Ramji Mahajan's wife. Badhu Nilgar held the hand of Neta Brahman's wife in qasba Dausa. These acts were regarded as violation of the code of proper conduct by the state. Chela Kumhar of village Vasai in pargana Niwai outraged the modesty of Lalri Malan by pulling her cheek. He was made to pay a fine. Jeeva tailor of qasba Malpura falsely accused Mohan tailor's wife. Jeeva Dai tried falsely to implicate Kushli Bhatni of carrying an illegitimate pregnancy. Since the accusers could not establish these charges, they were punished. Action was taken against Ram Rai Patel, headman of village Maheswa in pargana Hindon, for harassing a woman resident of the village who petitioned to the state. Kalyan Chamar of qasba Gijgarh was punished for kicking Lalu Chamar's wife.³⁹

The state upheld the notion of '*be-adbi*' in order to protect the honour of individuals and to regulate interpersonal social relationships in an orderly manner, cutting across caste, class, community, and gender. The term *be-adbi* is used in the documents in the sense of disrespect to individuals as well as a group of persons. What exactly was the perception of *be-adbi* is not entirely clear from documents pertaining to the cases. Kusla Kalal of village Piplai insulted the jagirdar. Kishor Das Rajdhar did not give due respect to the charan who came to attend his daughter's wedding. The patel of village Laksmipura and Khan Shah Meo of village Dabhila Khurd humiliated traders. Narsingh Meena of village Adha Ka Nangal, Karamsi Teli of village Bhandarej, and Kashiram Patel of village Varsuli were accused of insulting the Brahmans Sita, Jai Ram, and Gordhan respectively. Teja Purohit of village Dhawalia insulted a Balahi (untouchable). Kamal Dhadhi, a low caste, humiliated Deva Jat. Shyam Mahajan of qasba Fagi behaved rudely with Nanig Mahajan when the latter was selling sugarcane. A number of cases involving *be-adbi* to women were also brought to the notice of the authorities. Lalman Teli misbehaved with a Teli woman. Sukha Balahi of village Vanthali misbehaved with a Dhedh woman. Moti Ram Sethi did the same with the wife of a Mahajan of qasba Tonk, and Seva Meena of village Verhari insulted Mehar Bagri's wife. The context of *be-adbi* is revealed in the documents in a few cases. Thus, in qasba Sanganer, Gudhya Ranger untied the turban from the head of Deva sweeper. Nathu Gujar and Chokha Dayal Balahi misbehaved with the visiting marriage parties in their respective villages. The state took action in all these cases and the offenders were punished. However, these cases were differentiated from the cases involving molestation of women.⁴⁰

A large number of documents show the nature of the state's intervention in the affairs relating to marriage, remarriage, widow remarriage, breaking promises of marriage, non-adherence to prescribed customs and rituals, forcible marriage, intercaste marriage, illegal marriage, and so on. All these matters were considered to be within the jurisdiction of the caste panchayats as well as the state. The state also responded to direct appeals from individuals and panchayats asking for the resolution of such matters in accordance with caste regulations. Ensuring that marriage ceremonies were performed according to the

established norms of the caste and community was also considered to be a function of the state. Thus, action was taken against Bhagirath Ojha who married Ganga Ram Joshi's daughter without performing the prescribed ceremonials. Lachmi Das Mahajan, Raghunath Joshi, Bharmal, Chokhe Khati, Jay Ram Kumhar, Lal Jat, Khemla Balahi, Vija Sunar, Hem Ray Saraogi, and Gaglya Brahman, all residents of qasba Sawai Jaipur, were held guilty of violating one or the other norm governing the institution of marriage. All the tanners who had participated in the wedding ceremony of Neta Chamar's daughter were fined as the number of invitees crossed the prescribed limit. Bandhu Kunjra who brought a marriage party to Sawai Jaipur demanded that liquor be served. He was held guilty of violating the norm. Bandya Patel, headman of village Pali Kalan in pargana Bahatri served his guests liquor on the occasion of his son's marriage. This was also considered to be violation of proper social conduct. In the cases of Daya Ram Chhipa, Hathila Gujar, and Sundar Meena, residents of village Varoda in pargana Chatsu the feasts arranged during their daughter's wedding were found to be in excess of the prescribed limit and they were declared offenders. Dola Pinara of village Nivehra and Lala Teli of qasba Tonk got married without performing the *nikah* ceremony. They were fined and instructed to follow the correct ceremonial.⁴¹

Marriage contracts once formed were not allowed to be broken without the permission of the caste panchayat and the state. The state sought to enforce these contracts in the absence of any valid reason. Prior permission of the state was required even when a promise was broken with mutual consent. Chokha Mahajan of qasba Sawai Jaipur engaged his daughter to a Mahajan of qasba Kot. However, subsequently she was married off to a mahajan of Mewat. Siyji Sunar of qasba Niwai, Rustam Julaha of qasba Tonk, Kamal Pinara of qasba Malpura, and Manohar Kharwal of village Dogra in pargana Mauzabad were found to be guilty of dishonouring promises of marriage of their sons without consulting their respective panchayat and obtaining prior permission of the darbar (state). Sukha Brahman of qasba Todabhim engaged his granddaughter with Jogram Brahman, but later on she was married to someone else without seeking permission from the darbar. Toda Chamar of village Mohanpur in pargana Hindon got his daughter first engaged to a chamar of village Khandi and subsequently to a chamar of village Alipur. This led to a dispute between Toda and the chamar of Khandi. The latter appealed to the state, whereupon the state resolved this issue in consultation with the panch-chamar of qasba Hindon. Toda was permitted to break his earlier promise when he convinced the panchayat and the state that the chamar of Khandi was responsible for the breach of contract. However, both were fined for not reporting the matter to the state well in time. Hema mahajan of village Saket in pargana Bahatri was accused of engaging his daughter to four different persons and accepting money from them in violation of the practice of the caste. He was fined heavily. The degree of the state's intervention in such affairs is evident from the instance of Har Das Mahajan of village Nathilyara and Manohar Mahajan of village Vaseth in pargana Bahatri who resolved their dispute regarding marriage on their own without the arbitration of the state. This was regarded as an offence.⁴²

V

The state tried to uphold the existing caste order, code of conduct, and rules and regulations followed by each caste with regard to the institution of marriage. The middle castes, the artisans, and the menial castes followed the practice of *nata*, *gharvasa*, *gharijana*, or *dharecha* thereby permitting remarriage and widow marriage within the framework of their caste regulations as prescribed by the panchayat or the entire caste body (*jati*). The formal

recognition to such marriage contracts was granted by the state through an official order or *parwana*. Individual or group violation of rules framed by the caste bodies led to intervention by state. The state also regulated the relationship between individuals of different castes and between two castes in all matters concerning marriage ceremonies. The state intervened in numerous cases where remarriage was performed without the prior permission of the caste body and the state. Lala Lodha contracted dharecha (second marriage) with Uday Lodha's wife without informing the state. Purushottam Kumhar of qasba Todabhim, Shiv Ram Gujar of village Shiv Shankar Pura, Mathura Sunar of qasba Khohri, Nathya Mali of village Vilpura, Ganga Ram Gujar of village Bhuravas, and Lala Koli of village Kootalvas contracted gharvasa and nata according to the caste regulations, but failed to report the matter to the state, a mandatory requirement. Similarly, Sukha Patel, Roopa Dholi, Nathu Sunar, Ram Lal Mali, Tulsi Khati, Kirpa Khati, Lala Koli, Ghasi Chamar, Dunga Jat, Chokhla Meena, Bhura Kalal, Nanig Bharbhunja, and Roopa and Kusla Balahi entered into nata and gharvasa without involving the caste or the panchas. Not only were they instructed to obtain the consent of the caste or the panchas, but also punished for not following the correct procedure. In a somewhat peculiar case involving Kashi Gujar of village Vorara Kalan in pargana Malarna, who first sexually assaulted Daya Ram Gujar's wife and thereafter established gharijana (marriage) with her, the state did not accept this marriage. Similarly, Khanjahan Kagdi's gharvasa with a Kagdi woman, who was guilty of burying alive her illegitimate newborn child, was not accepted by the state.⁴³

Inter-caste marriages and liaisons were regarded as caste contamination and such associations were broken up by the state. Ajmeri Muslim of qasba Rini and Khushal Jat of village Newta kept Bhat women. Mansapuri Gosain, Miyan Shahwaz, and Maya Ram Tomar were reported to be keeping Brahman women. A mahajan caste woman was staying with Udai Singh Sultanote and a Rajput woman was living with Bhodhar Brahman. All of them were declared guilty of violating caste order and norms by the state. Pema Ahir of qasba Tonk, who married his sister to Pancham Dakhni, a Maratha, was punished for violating caste rules.⁴⁴

The state did not approve of inter-caste marriages even when contracted without ascertaining the real caste status of the spouse. Bandhu Thathera married a Bhatiar caste woman without knowing her real caste. Ramji Kalal of qasba Mauzabad got married to a Bhat girl unaware of her caste status. Upon discovering her caste he abandoned her. He was punished not for turning her out but for getting married to her. Similarly, Rupla Khati of village Girdharipur in pargana Chatsu got engaged to a Teli girl who was introduced as belonging to his caste. He married her and then broke the marriage when her true caste identity was revealed. The girl was restored to her Teli parents. However, Rupla did not escape punishment. Nanig Mahajan, a Vaishnav, fixed his marriage to the daughter of a Sarvagi (Jain) mahajan of qasba Fagi. He was fined and made to reverse his decision by the state.⁴⁵

Caste contamination could also result from interacting with persons of the wrong caste. Teja Chamar was offered food at the residence of the Brahman of village Vuroli in pargana Gaji Ka Thana. Khivsi tailor sold his wife to a Teli of village Vajoli. Chokha Gidori of qasba Chatsu bought utensils from a Muslim butcher. Bhoji Ram Brahman of village Sachari sold tobacco and Jiwan Bajaj brought coarse cloth from the houses of untouchable Balahis. All these actions were regarded by the state as representing dereliction of caste norms and hence punishable acts. Maharam Mahajan's wife bought the son of Isa Pinara, a Muslim, and tried to pass him off as her own. She even celebrated his birthday and shared food with him. The state took a serious view of her behaviour and imposed a fine of Rs 401 on her.⁴⁶

The state also dealt with various issues involving religious matters, professional ethics, violation of customary practices, and morally undesirable actions of individuals. With regard to all these issues the state tended to follow tradition and customary practices, and took corrective measures in the light of these. No business transaction and manufacturing activity could be undertaken on certain auspicious days. Amar Mahajan of qasba Talsot sold tobacco on the day of Ekadashi; Sarupa Mahajan of qasba Mauzabad purchased cotton; Pema Aggarwal of qasba Fagi weighed grain; and the lac workers of qasba Talsot did not abstain from work on that day. Kushal Chhipa of qasba Bahatri violated the norm by dyeing clothes during the period of fasting in the month of Bhadon (August–September). Teja Teli, Khanshah, and Madari Teli operated their oil-presses on the day of Sankranti. All of them were declared guilty and fined. Sekha Mahajan's refusal to wear sacred thread (*janeu*), worship of a well by panch-Darjee (tailors), and wives of Deepa Kalal and Panchya Mochi were also regarded as what were considered to be violations of religious conventions. Lalu sweeper of qasba Chatsu forced his wife to swear over coconut. A kalal of village Sahajpur visited the dargah of Laldas after consuming liquor. Panch-Mahajans of qasba Malarna refused to sell ghee. Nanig Brahman performed his religious duty in the temple of village Nijharna in pargana Lalsot without having bath. Panch-Mahajans of qasba Lalsot were held guilty of deliberately evading participation in the procession of Dashera, which was joined by all according to the tradition. Himmat Brahman of village Rajhori in pargana Mauzabad decided to organize '*Brahm-bhoj*' after committing adultery with his daughter-in-law, obliging her to commit suicide. He was not allowed to do so by the state. Uda Gidori was prohibited from pursuing the profession of making sweetmeats. Despite this ban he prepared sweatmeats, without the consent of the panchas, and this was held to be an offence by the state. Dhanna Mahajan's sister, who was carrying an illegitimate child, committed suicide by jumping into the well. He was fined for fishing out her dead body and performing her last rites in violation of the social conduct as laid down by the state. Jamal Murid, alleged to be a quack, was practising medicine in qasba Naraina. Ram Kanwar Mali of village Virota was found to be falsely claiming knowledge of sacred hymns. Luna Chhipa of qasba Malarna washed dyed clothes in the pond. All these actions were seen to be violation of tradition, ethically wrong, and detrimental to the interests of other residents of the area. It was observed that Duda Gujar's wife was indulging in excessive make-up. This was also seen as a social offence by the state.⁴⁷

The state took a serious view of violations of customary practices of the village. There were two *pateli* jurisdictions in village Aranya Bujurg, one held by a Brahman patel and the other by a Gujar patel. The custom in the village was to burn one Holi bonfire in the jurisdiction of the Brahman patel. However, Teja Gujar burnt a second Holi bonfire in his jurisdiction in violation of the long-standing custom of the village. He was fined Rs 57.⁴⁸

In matters relating to the social institutions, the caste panchayat exercised a great deal of influence. The major source of its strength was that its decisions were capable of implementation at the hands of the state administration, and the state respected the rights and jurisdiction of the caste panchayat. The state used it as an instrument to intervene in social affairs. Yet the state entertained appeals from individuals against the verdict of the caste panchayat, and at times overruled its decision to demonstrate its overarching authority. The degree and nature of control exercised by the state on the caste panchayat was indeed considerable. Autonomy of the caste panchayat in internal supervision and regulations of caste affairs at times was superseded when the caste panchas were punished by the state for overstepping their authority as visualized by the state. Ghasi Kalal of qasba Chatsu was excommunicated by the panch-Kalals without any justification. Panch-Telis of qasba Sawai Jaipur excommunicated Luna Teli without informing the darbar. Kalu Kumhar who had

been excommunicated was taken back into the fold by the panch-Kumhars without caring to inform the darbar. The state not only disapproved of the pancha's action, but also imposed a fine upon them. The state took action against the panchas in other cases where they behaved arbitrarily. Panch-Telis of qasba Fagi fixed the engagement of Neta Teli's daughter without consulting Neta's wife. Panch-Sunars of qasba Dausa spent the money left behind by Deva Sunar's deceased wife to perform her death rites without asking the darbar. In both cases the panchas were declared defaulters for having exceeded their authority.⁴⁹

Autonomy of the caste panchayat was eroded further by the state's insistence that all matters concerning the violation of social conduct and norms were to be reported to the various state authorities without exception. It was also mandatory that all decisions taken through the deliberations of the caste panchayat were to be formally endorsed by the state.

The documents constituting the historical evidence for this essay are somewhat unique, both in content and volume. They allow us a glimpse of state authority in operation in the late medieval period. The paradigms available for analysing the pre-colonial or the non-colonial state in India generally tend to view Indian states as passive, the darbar exercising only a loose control over its constituent elements. The actual practice of administration was supposed to be left either to the lords of the land or the various social segments of the state, which continued to be governed by the customary conventions of the communities. The state and the communities are believed to have come together only on special occasions such as religious festivals, wars, or natural calamities. These documents, however, give us a different picture, the picture of a state overarching in its authority and a state that was not hesitant to put its administrative apparatus to full use to regulate affairs to the level of the village, its distinct social groups, and even its individual residents.

Although the channels of communication through which the affairs of the village reached the apex level are not altogether clear, it seems that the village and caste panchas served as an effective channel and that the state insisted on their acting as an effective channel. At one level there seems to have been collaboration between the panchas and the apex authority. However, despite the weight of conventions and customary laws, the decisions of the panchas could not be finally binding on the apex body because of the need for legal framework, which could transcend the norms of different communities. The state's primary concern for preserving the social order, which was working in favour of the king as the ultimate authority, is illustrated by the way in which the state was trying to prohibit overlapping of castes, whether through marriages, sexual unions, or shift in professions. This was the sanction for the state's authority over different conventions and norms, which the state tried to bring within one framework by using existing institutions. The deviations and cases of the state's direct intervention suggest that the relationship was a dynamic one.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Muhnot, *Nainsi Ri Khyat* (hereafter *Khyat*) (vol. II) (edited B.P. Sakaria) Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, (Jodhpur, 1967), p. 277.
- 2 Ibid., p. 300; *ibid.* (vol. III), pp. 3, 57, 113; Nainsi, *Marwar Ra Pargana Ri Vigat* (hereafter *Vigat*) (vol. I) (edited by Narayan Singh Bhati) Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, (Jodhpur, 1969), p. 19.
- 3 Bhadana is the des of the Saran Jats; the Mughals took possession of Gujarat des; Pokaran des is colonized by Nara; Amad des is situated in Mandu des and *pargana* Antri is located in Amad des; Antri was bestowed upon Rao Siva Sisodia and he was permitted to proceed to his des. *Khyat* (vol. II), pp. 14, 57, 113, 245.
- 4 *Khyat* (vol. I), pp. 72, 77, 78, 80, 83, 129, 318, 331; (vol. II), pp. 14, 57, 111, 113, 135-41, 154, 206; (vol. III), pp. 81, 133, 154, 156-60, 240, 241, 246; *Vigat* (vol. I), pp. 17, 23-25; (vol. II), p. 245, Appendix.

Basi was the personal settlement of the *bhomia* where his tenants, etc. used to reside. *Guda* was a fortified settlement that used to serve as a shelter.

- 5 *Vigat* (vol. I), p. 38; *Khyat* (vol. II), p. 220. Rawal Jam is credited to have conquered Khaliland in Sorath where he founded the town Navanagar in 1539. *Vigat* (vol. II), p. 9. The term *ujar* is also used as a synonym for *khali des*. *Vigat* (vol. II), pp. 37–9.
- In the case of Phalodi, initiative was taken by Rao Suja who suggested to his son Nara to consider conquering Phalodi. He urged upon Nara at least to make an exploratory visit to Phalodi, whereupon Nara made up his mind to conquer and colonize it. *Vigat*, (vol. II), p. 8. Merta was granted by Jodha to Vir Singh and Duda who took possession of the area and thereafter set upon the task of its colonization.
- 6 *Vigat*, (vol. II), p. 37–41. For different connotations of the term *thakurai*, see *Khyat* (vol. I), pp. 72, 77, 80, 83, 318; (vol. II), p. 277; (vol. III), pp. 133, 160, 245.
- 7 *Ibid.*, (vol. I), pp. 39, 40.
- 8 *Ibid.*, (vol. I), pp. 77–8; (vol. III), pp. 157–60, 161.
- 9 *Ibid.*, (vol. II), pp. 140–41, 240. The tract of land termed *kharad* is marked by high ridges, numerous wells, and tanks and a big dry run that has full capacity to retain a good amount of water to be used for irrigation.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 110–11, 140–41.
- 11 *Ibid.*, (vol. III), pp. 240–46.
- 12 *Vigat* (vol. I), p. 95.
- 13 *Khyat* (vol. I), p. 95.
- 14 Conflict between the ruler and powerful members of the clan lineage arising out of such a situation is best illustrated in the case of Biram Deo and his son Jaimal Rathor of Merta who refused to acknowledge the authority of Rao Ganga and Rao Maldeo of Jodhpur. According to Nainsi, the Merta Rathor *thakurs* grew very powerful, and became more resourceful than the Rao of Jodhpur. (*Vigat* [vol. II], pp. 51–2). A petty monarchy becoming autonomous *bhomichara* (zamindari unit) of the clan lineage and at a later stage being further reduced to a revenue-paying intermediary zamindari as a result of historical change is evident from the case of Maroth where Vachh Raj Gaur had set up a small principality in 1057. The area was held by the Gaurs in *bhomichara* for several generations till Akbar's conquest of Rajasthan. The emperor began to assign Maroth in *tankhwah* jagir to imperial mansabdars. However, the Gaurs were allowed to retain their *bhom* rights on the condition of paying revenue (*Vigat* [vol. II], p. 425).
- 15 *Ibid.*, (vol. I), pp. 12–15.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 15–19, 25, 36–8.
- 18 *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 25, 36–43. Maldeo inherited Ganga's territory comprising Jodhpur, Sojat, and Jaitaran. In addition to his *bapoti*, he acquired Nagor, Merta, Ajmer, Sambhar, Bawal, Malpura, Sanchar, Siwana, Didwana, Jalor, Phalodi, Pokaran, Jahajpur, Badnor, Godwad, Kotra, Radhan Pur, Bhatkharh, Bikaner, Rajpura, Badmer, Chatsu, Naraina. Rewsa, Bhinai, Tonk, Toda, Kalsi, Raipur, Barmer, Salemabad, and Bhadrajan over different points in time. Newly conquered areas are referred to as *navi khati dharti* by Maldeo. *Vigat* (vol. I), p. 43.
- 19 *Ibid.* (vol. II), p. 51.
- 20 *Ibid.* p. 57.
- 21 *Khyat* (vol. I), p. 54.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- 23 *Vigat* (vol. I), pp. 53–4. Ancestral land grants (*udik*) of the Charans in Nagor, which they had lost after Maldeo's death, were subsequently restored to them by Kanwar Jagat Singh Kachhawaha of Amber when pargana Nagor was assigned to him in *tankhwah* jagir by the Mughal emperor.
- 24 *Vigat* (vol. I), pp. 78–82; *Bankidas Ri Khyat*, p. 23.
- 25 Cf. S. Inayat Ali Zaidi, 'The Origin of the Institution of Watan Jagir, *Quarterly Review of Historical Studies*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1980–81, p. 19.
- 26 *Vigat* (vol. I), p. 151.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 496; (vol. II), p. 72.
- 28 *Ibid.* (vol. I), pp. 83–90, 91–5, 124–5.
- 29 *Ibid.* (vol. II), pp. 1–7, 288–9, 421–2.
- 30 *Ibid.* (vol. I), p. 108.
- 31 *Vakil Reports* (Persian), *Arzdasht* from Kesho Ram to Maharaja Bishan Singh, old no. 590, Historical Section, Jaipur Records, Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner, undated.
- 32 *Vigat* (vol. II), p. 298.

- 33 *Chithi* (letter) to the *amil* pargana Gaji Ka Thana, *Sawan Vadi* 13 vs 1796/1739; pargana Chatsu, Asarh Vadi 4, vs 1812/1765, to the faujdar Jeth Vadi 4, vs 1812/1765; Amber Records, letter from Ganga Dhar to Tiwari ji, Vaisakh Sudi 9, vs 1818/1761.
- 34 *Chithi* to the *amil* pargana Fagi Kati Vadi 9, V.S. 1783/1726; Jeth Sudi 10, VS 1789/1732.
- 35 *Arhsatta* pargana Toda Bhim, VS 1788/1731. *Arhsatta* pargana Chatsu, VS 1769/1712, Fagi VS 1780/1723. *Arhsatta* pargana Malarna, VS 1839/1782. *Arhsatta* pargana Naraina, VS 1812/1755. *Arhsatta* pargana Malpura, VS 1744/1687. *Arhsatta* pargana Udehi, VS 1823/1766.
- 36 *Arhsatta* pargana Malpura, VS 1830/1773. *Arhsatta* pargana Bahatri, VS 1814/1757. *Arhsatta* pargana Toda Bhim, VS 1798/1741; Gaji Ka Thana VS 1828/1771; pargana Chatsu, VS 1815/1758. *Arhsatta* pargana Niwai, VS 1823/1766. *Arhsatta* pargana Malpura, VS 1776/1719. *Arhsatta* pargana Tonk, VS 1795/1738. *Arhsatta* pargana Toda Bhim, VS 1798/1721. *Arhsatta* pargana Toda Bhim, VS 1824/1767, Hindon VS 1785/1728. *Arhsatta* pargana Hindon, VS 1785/1728.
- 37 *Arhsatta* pargana Toda Bhim, VS 1798/1741. *Arhsatta* pargana Latsot, VS 1827/1770. *Arhsatta* pargana Gaji Ka Thana, VS 1824/1767. *Arhsatta* pargana Dausa, VS 1770/1737. *Arhsatta* pargana Mauzabad, VS 1770/1713. *Arhsatta* qasba Sanganer, VS 1812/1755. *Arhsatta* pargana Hindon, VS 1785/1728.
- 38 *Arhsatta* pargana Dausa, VS 1826/1769. *Arhsatta* pargana Chatsu, VS 1817/1760.
- 39 *Arhsatta* pargana Tonk, VS 1795/1738. *Arhsatta* pargana Latsot, VS 1820/1763. *Arhsatta* pargana Dausa, VS 1793/1736. *Arhsatta* pargana Niwai, VS 1798/1741. *Arhsatta* pargana Malpura, VS 1830/1773. Ibid, VS 1798/1741. *Arhsatta* pargana Hindon, VS 1778/1721. *Arhsatta* pargana Gijgarh, VS 1782/1725.
- 40 *Arhsatta* pargana Udehi, VS 1772/1715. *Arhsatta* pargana Gaji Ka Thana, VS 1814/1757. *Arhsatta* pargana Chatsu VS 1773/1716; Bahatri, VS 1781/1724. *Arhsatta* pargana Malarna, VS 1805/1748; Bahatri, VS 1770/1713, Hindon, VS 1785/1728. *Arhsatta* pargana Chatsu, VS 1772/1785. *Arhsatta* pargana Malpura, VS 1770/1713. *Arhsatta* pargana Fagi, VS 1774/1717. *Arhsatta* pargana Malarna, VS 1771/1714; Niwai VS 1798/1741; Tonk, VS. 1778/1721; Toda Bhim, VS 1772/1715. *Arhsatta* qasba Sanganer VS 1825/1768. *Arhsatta* pargana Hindon, VS 1804/1747; Chatsu VS 1771/1714.
- 41 *Arhsatta* pargana Chatsu, VS. 1790/1733. *Arhsatta* qasba Sawai Jaipur, VS 1795/1738, 1797/1740. Ibid, VS. 1797/1740. *Arhsatta* pargana Bahatri, VS 1773/1716. *Arhsatta* pargana Chatsu, VS 1794/1737. *Arhsatta* pargana Tonk, VS. 1793/1736, pargana Toda Bhim, VS 1824/1767.
- 42 *Arhsatta* pargana Sawai Jaipur, VS 1793/1736. *Arhsatta* pargana Malpura, VS 1830/1773; pargana Mauzabad, VS 1721/1666. *Arhsatta* pargana Toda Bhim, VS 1804/1747. *Arhsatta* pargana Hindon, VS 1779/1742. *Arhsatta* pargana Bahatri, VS 1748/1691. Ibid, VS, 1745/1688.
- 43 *Arhsatta* pargana Chatsu, VS 1780/1743. *Arhsatta* pargana Toda Bhim, VS 1844/1787; pargana Niwai VS 1799/1742; pargana Khohri, VS 1815/1758; pargana Gaji Ka Thana, VS 1825/1768; pargana Latsot, VS 1820/1763. *Arhsatta* pargana Toda Bhim, VS 1788/1751; pargana Tonk, VS 1819/1762; pargana Malpura, VS 1818/1761; pargana Naraina VS 1799/1742; pargana Gaji Ka Thana, VS 1825/1768, VS 1827/1770; pargana Latsot, VS 1820/1763; pargana Dausa, VS 1824/1767; pargana Mauzabad, VS 1812/1755, VS 1818/1761. *Arhsatta* pargana Malarna, VS 1774/1727.
- 44 *Arhsatta* pargana Chatsu, VS 1809/1752. *Arhsatta* qasba Sawai Jaipur, VS 1797/1740. *Arhsatta* pargana Toda Bhim, VS 1844/1787.
- 45 *Arhsatta* pargana Fagi, VS 1778/1721. *Arhsatta* pargana Dausa, VS 1817/1760. *Arhsatta* pargana Bahatri, VS 1768/1711; pargana Naraina VS 1812/1765. *Arhsatta* pargana Niwai, VS 1799/1742; pargana Tonk, VS 1896/1739; pargana Gaji Ka Thana, VS 1815/1758.
- 46 *Arhsatta* pargana Chatsu, VS 1815/1758. *Arhsatta* pargana Latsot, VS 1770/1713; pargana Bahatri VS 1782/1725. *Arhsatta* pargana Tonk, VS 1818/1761. *Arhsatta* qasba Sawai Jaipur, VS 1798/1741. *Arhsatta* pargana Mauzabad, VS 1790/1733.
- 47 *Arhsatta* pargana Chatsu, VS 1810/1753. *Arhsatta* pargana Sawai Jaipur, VS 1798/1741. *Arhsatta* pargana Gaji Ka Thana, VS 1814/1757. *Arhsatta* pargana Bahatri, VS 1780/1723. *Arhsatta* pargana Chatsu, VS 1783/1726. *Arhsatta* pargana Niwai, VS 1846/1789. *Arhsatta* pargana Gaji Ka Thana, VS 1807/1750. *Arhsatta* pargana Chatsu, VS 1775/1718; pargana Mauzabad VS 1830/1773; pargana Fagi, VS 1774/1717; pargana Latsot, VS 1820/1763; *Arhsatta* pargana Bahatri, VS 178/1724. *Arhsatta* pargana Mauzabad, VS 1753/1696; pargana Toda Bhim, VS 1804/1747. *Arhsatta* pargana Gijgarh, VS 1778/1721; pargana Dausa, VS 1803/1746. *Arhsatta* pargana Chatsu, VS 1817/1760. *Arhsatta* pargana Khohri, VS 1811/1754. *Arhsatta* pargana Naraina, VS 1819/1762. *Arhsatta* pargana Latsot, VS 1767/1710. *Arhsatta* pargana Malarna, VS 1839/1782. *Arhsatta* pargana Sawai Jaipur, VS 1797/1740.
- 48 *Arhsatta* pargana Naraina, VS 1811/1754.
- 49 *Arhsatta* pargana Hindon, VS 1780/1723. *Arhsatta* pargana Sawai Jaipur, VS 1791/1740. *Arhsatta* pargana Malpura, VS 1791/1734. *Arhsatta* pargana Chatsu, VS 1765/1708. *Arhsatta* pargana Latsot, VS 1770/1723.

CHAPTER 18

The Sultanate of Bengal

Aniruddha Ray

The sultanate of Bengal enjoyed an independent existence for nearly 200 years from 1338 to 1538. Even before 1338, since the beginning of the thirteenth century, an independent kingdom was established in Lakhnauti (West Bengal) from time to time. After 1538 too, Bengal remained independent for nearly a quarter of a century before its annexation to the Mūghal empire in 1576. For a study of 'the state and society' in Bengal, therefore, we may take into account the developments in the region from the beginning of the thirteenth century to the establishment of Mūghal rule in Bengal.

I

Lakhnauti was conquered by Ikhtiyarūddin Mūhammad Bakhtyār, a Khalji troop leader, in 1204–5. He had been employed by Mālik Hūsamuddin Ughulbāk who was the commander of the Benaras and Awadh region under Mūizzūddin, the ruler of Ghor. A year earlier Bakhtyār had occupied Bihār. Then, with a small number of horsemen, he appeared before the gates of Lakshmana Sena's residence at Nadia, and the king took flight. When Bakhtyār's main force arrived later, the troops of Lakshmana Sena offered no resistance. Bakhtyār sacked Nadiā and marched northwards to establish his headquarters at Lakhnauti, the western capital of the Senas, close to the present site of Gauṛ in Māldah district. He established two military outposts: one at Lakhanor on the route from Bihār to Orissa, and the other at Devkot to the north-east of Lakhnauti. The territory conquered by Bakhtyār lay on both sides of the Ganges, called Rarh and Vārendri, covering parts of the modern districts of Māldah, Dinājpur, Mūrshidābād, and Birbhūm.¹ Though Bakhtyār was independent for all practical purposes, he issued coins in the name of Mūizzūddin.²

Within two years of his attack on Nadia, Bakhtyār undertook an expedition to conquer 'Tibet and China'. Probably, he did not go beyond Assam. In any case, his expedition proved to be a dismal failure, resulting in the death of a large number of his troops. He escaped the disaster to reach Devkot, but there he sank under grief. One of his own

lieutenants, Ali Maṛdān, stabbed him to death. Ali Maṛdān was imprisoned by the nobles loyal to Bakhtyār, but he escaped and went to the court of Qūtbūddin Aibak who assigned him the territory of Lakhnauti. The Khalji nobles at Lakhnauti submitted to Ali Maṛdān. After Aibak's death in 1210 he assumed the canopy of state (*chhatra*) and got the *khūtba* read in his name. He proved to be a harsh ruler and, sometime after 1211, he was murdered. Hūsamūddin Iwāz took the title of Sultan Ghiyāsūddin to assume sovereign status. He appears to have extended his authority to the north of Bihār.³

Iltūtmish turned his attention to Iwāz only after the Mongol threat to the sultanate of Delhi was lifted. He wrested Bihār and marched against Iwāz, who submitted to Iltūtmish, acknowledged his suzerainty, and agreed to pay indemnity. He also agreed to relinquish his claim over Bihār, and Mālik Jānī was appointed by Iltūtmish as the governor of Bihār. After the sultan's return to Delhi, Iwāz reasserted his independence and drove out Jānī from Bihār. Iltūtmish instructed prince Nāsirūddin Māhmūd, governor of Awadh, to deal with Iwāz. In 1226–27, when Iwāz was absent from his capital, Nāsirūddin suddenly seized Lakhnauti. Iwāz returned hurriedly but only to be defeated and killed. Lakhnauti was placed under Nāsirūddin Māhmūd as his father's deputy. After Nāsirūddin's death, Balkā who was perhaps related to Iwāz, became the leader of Khalji nobles and ousted Nāsirūddin's successor from Lakhnauti. Balkā was defeated and killed by the armies of Iltūtmish. Lakhnauti and Bihār were placed under two separate governors.⁴

After the death of Iltūtmish in 1236, Tughan Khān maintained a show of allegiance to Sultana Rāziya and Sultan Bāhrām, but his actions showed no subordination. He annexed Bihār towards the end of Bāhrām's reign, and sent expeditions into the other eastern provinces of the sultanate of Delhi during the reign of Māsūd. However, he was dissuaded by the historian Minhāj from declaring independence. Soon afterwards, he was defeated by the forces of Jājnagar (Orissa), and felt compelled to seek help from Delhi. Balbān was quick to respond, but only to dislodge him from Lakhnauti. Under Balbān's instructions Tāmūr Khān, the governor of Awadh, tricked Tughan Khān into submission and obliged him to relinquish control over Lakhnauti. Both Tāmūr Khān and Tughan Khān died in 1246.⁵

Yūzbāk-i Tūghril Khān, who had held Kānauj and subsequently Awadh, was appointed to Lakhnauti. But he followed the example of Tūghan Khān, going in fact to the extent of declaring his independence as Sultan Mūghisūddin and striking coin in his own name. After his death in 1256 or 1257, Izzūddin Balbān-i Yūzbāki appears to have submitted to the sultan of Delhi and was allowed to govern Lakhnauti. Towards the end of 1259, or early in 1260, Arslān Khān, the governor of Kārrāh, advanced on Lakhnauti in Izzūddin's absence, seized the capital, and later defeated and killed him in battle. Arslān Khān did not assume sovereignty, but he did not acknowledge the authority of Nāsirūddin Māhmūd either. After his death in 1264, his son Tātār Khān succeeded to his position.⁶

Tātār Khān submitted to Balbān and sent a number of elephants to Delhi. Subsequently, however, he was replaced by Tūghril. Though originally a slave of Balbān, Tūghril asserted independence by withholding the king's share of spoils, and then assumed sovereignty with the title of Sultan Mūghisūddin. Balbān directed the governor of Awadh to bring Tūghril back to submission. However, the Delhi forces were defeated in battle and some of the troops actually joined Tūghril's forces. Eventually, Balbān himself marched against Tūghril, taking with him his second son Būghrā Khān. Tūghril left Lakhnauti and went into the territory of Sonārgāon (East Bengal). Balbān left Lakhnauti under the charge of Mālik Hūsamūddin and went in pursuit of Tūghril, who was ultimately slain. Balbān appointed Būghrā Khān as the governor of Lakhnauti.⁷

After Balbān's death in 1287, Būghrā Khān's son Kāiqubād was placed on the throne at Delhi. Būghrā Khān assumed sovereignty in Lakhnauti. However, he did not remain indifferent to the happenings at Delhi and decided to meet his son and suzerain. Both of them marched with their armies and met in Awadh. Būghrā Khān agreed to pay homage to the sultan of Delhi. They remained together for some time, and Būghrā Khān advised his son to live up to the traditions of his family. Sultan Kāiqubād went back to Delhi and Būghrā Khān returned to Lakhnauti to set up an independent dynasty that ruled for nearly forty years.⁸

The Khalji sultans of Delhi, despite the expansionist policy of Alaūddin, did not extend their authority to Bengal. Ghiyāsūddin Tūghluq, however, led an expedition to Bengal in 1324 and made it a part of the Delhi sultanate. During the reign of Mūhāmmad bin Tūghluq, when another part of the sultanate became independent, Bengal did not lag behind. At this time Bengal stood divided into three administrative units, with the capital at Lakhnauti for north Bengal, at Sonārgāon for east Bengal, and at Sāt-gāon for south Bengal. At Sonārgāon, Fakhrūddin Mūbārak Shāh assumed independence in 1336. At Lakhnauti, Alaūddin Ali Shāh declared himself to be independent and moved his capital to Pāndūa. Alaūddin's foster brother Shāmsūddin Iliyās Shāh united Bengal in 1345. Firoz Shāh Tughlūq had to come to terms with him after an unsuccessful expedition. He occupied Pandua, but Iliyās Shāh took shelter in the strong fort of Ekdālā. He came out of the fort once to battle Firoz Shāh, but he was defeated and once again he retreated into Ekdālā. A treaty of friendship was finally concluded by which the river Kosi in Bihār became the boundary between the sultanate of Delhi and of Bengal.⁹

Iliyās Shāh died in 1358 to be succeeded by his son Sikandar Shāh. In his reign too Firoz Tūghlaq invaded Bengal. Following the tactics of his father, Sikandar Shāh retreated to Ekdālā, and Firoz Shāh failed to capture it. On Sikandar's death in 1389–90, he was succeeded by Ghiyāsūddin Azam Shāh who proved to be the most famous sultan of the Iliyās Shāhi dynasty. After his death in 1409–10, Raja Ganesha of Dinājpur (Rājshāhi) became the kingmaker, and himself became the ruler eventually in 1415. Subsequently, however, he was repudiated by some of the ulāmā and the Sufis of Bengal who invited Sultan Ibrāhim Shāh of Jaunpūr to invade Bengal. A compromise was worked out through the intercession of Shaikh Nūr Qūtb-i Alam. Raja Ganesha's twelve-year-old son was converted to Islam and proclaimed king with the title of Jālālūddin. On Ibrāhim Shāh's return to Jaunpūr, Raja Ganesha ruled in the name of his son for three years. Jālālūddin himself died in 1431 to be succeeded by his son Shamsūddin Ahmad Shāh who ruled for five years. The Iliyās Shāhi dynasty was restored in 1437. The second ruler of the restoration, Rūknūddin Barbāk Shāh (1459–74), organized a militia of Ethiopian slaves and recruited Arab soldiers as his palace guards. In 1487 the Iliyās Shāhi dynasty was overthrown by Sultan Shāhzādā Barbāk Shāh, the commander of the Ethiopian guards. The Ethiopians were dislodged in 1494 by the Arab Alāūddin Hūsain Shāh. He replaced the Ethiopian soldiers and administrators with Bengali Hindus and Muslims. Hūsain Shāh died in 1519, but his successors ruled over Bengal till 1538.¹⁰

In 1535–36 Sher Khān (later Sher Shāh) declared war on Bengal and appeared before the gates of Gauṛ with a large army. Sultan Māhmūd Shāh of Bengal agreed to pay indemnity and to recognize Sher Khān as his sovereign. On Māhmūd Shāh's inability or reluctance to pay tribute, Sher Khān occupied Bengal early in 1538, which induced Humayūn to open negotiations with Māhmūd Shāh. However, Māhmūd Shāh's death obliged Humayūn to conquer Bengal. He reached Gauṛ in September 1538. After staying in Bengal for a few months, he left Jāhāngir Qūli Khān in control of Bengal. After Humayūn's defeat at the

hands of Sher Khān, Bengal came under the control of Sher Shāh and remained under the administrative control of governors appointed by his successor Islām Shāh till his death in 1553. On the death of Islām Shāh, the Sūr empire stood divided into five independent kingdoms: the Punjab under Sikandar Shāh; Sambhal and the Doab under Ibrāhīm Shāh; Bihār under Adil Shāh; Mālwa under Bāz Bāhādūr; and Bengal under Muḥammad Khān.¹¹

Mūhammad Khān was killed by Adil Shāh, and Bāhādūr ascended the throne of Bengal. To revenge the death of his father, Bāhādūr defeated and killed Adil Shāh in 1556. Bāhādūr was succeeded by his brother Jālāl Shāh, who in turn was followed by his son who was murdered. The Kārrāni Afghans espoused the cause of the murdered prince. Tāj Khān killed the murderer and began to govern in the name of Sulaimān. After Tāj Khān's death in 1564, Sulaimān assumed the title of Hazrat Ali and shifted the capital to Tāndā. Subsequently, he accepted Akbar's suzerainty by reading the khūtbā and striking coins in the emperor's name. Sulaimān died in 1572. The Afghan nobles killed his eldest son and successor Bāyāzid and placed his second son Dāūd on the throne. Probably on the suggestion of the Afghan nobles, Dāūd stopped the khūtbā to be read and coins to be struck in the name of the Mughal emperor. Akbar ordered Mūnim Khān to invade Bengal—thorough preparations were required because the ruler of Bengal was believed to possess an army of 40,000 well-mounted cavalry, 140,000 infantry, 3,600 elephants, 20,000 guns and thousands of war boats.¹²

Equipped with a large army, Mūnim Khān started operations against the Afghans. He was able to win Lodi Khān to his side. Dāūd appealed to Lodi Khān's patriotism and induced him by flattery and kind words to return. But this proved to be a trick to get him executed. Dāūd entered Pātnā to defend it and having failed to take it, Mūnim Khān requested the emperor to 'untie the knot'. Akbar sent a message to Dāūd either to surrender the fort or to fight a duel with the emperor to settle the quarrel. Sher Shāh had boasted that man to man the Mūghal was inferior to the Afghan. Akbar's challenge to Dāūd could be in response to this. The Mūghals captured Hājipūr and Dāūd left the fort of Pātnā, which was occupied by the Mūghals. Teliā Gaṛhi, the key to Bengal, was captured and the Mūghal army under Mūnim Khān entered Tāndā (near Gaur), the capital of Bengal. From there expeditions were sent in all directions to subjugate the Afghan nobles. Ultimately Dāūd sued for peace and accepted the usual terms of vassalage. Mūnim Khān returned to Tāndā and died at Gaur in October 1575. Dāūd tore off the treaty and reoccupied Tāndā. The new Mūghal governor of Bengal, Hūsain Qūli Khān-i Jāhān, captured Teliā Gaṛhi and fortified himself at Rājmahal. A battle was fought in July 1576 in which the Mūghals were victorious. Todar Mal pursued Dāūd closely and captured him. The Khān-i Jāhān was unwilling to take Dāūd's life because he was a handsome man. But the Mūghal nobles compelled him to chop off his head to be sent to the emperor. With Dāūd's death in 1576, the independent kingdom of Bengal came to its end.¹³

II

Some of the policies, measures, and attitudes of the rulers in Bengal appear to have a bearing on socio-economic and cultural change as much as on the character of the state. During the rule of Ali Mardān, for example, the Sanskrit work entitled *Amritakunda*, which related to yoga, was translated into Arabic by Rūknūddin Sāmārqandī, the chief qāzi of Lakhnauti.¹⁴ The silver coins of Ghiyāsūddin Iwāz included the name of the Caliph al-Nāsir, besides his own sovereign titles.¹⁵ When Firoz Tūghluq invaded Bengal after the assumption of sovereignty by Iliyās Shāh, he tried to win over the inhabitants of Pāndūā to

his side by offering liberal grants of land to the nobles, the ulāmā, and the Sufis but he failed to get any response because Iliyās Shāh was popular among the people of Lakhnauti.¹⁶ Iliyās Shāh's reign was also marked by the development of an impressive coinage system, and he erected a number of important monuments. Ghiyāsuddin Azam Shāh established diplomatic and cultural relations with China, and promoted trade with the Far East through the port of Chittagong.¹⁷ He was also known for his love of justice, and had close relations with the learned men of his times, including the celebrated Persian poet Hāfiz. During his reign many Sufis came to Bengal and received grants of revenue-free land.¹⁸

The sultans of Bengal adorned their capitals, Gauṛ and Pāndūā, with magnificent buildings. The Adinā mosque was large enough to accommodate several thousand people. The stones used for its construction were mostly pillaged from temples and other buildings. The rule of Alāuddin Hūsain marked a significant period in the growth of the Bengali language, which was patronized by the sultans. Some of the famous Bengali writers flourished during his reign. His example was followed by the nobles who gave patronage to Bengali poets. The sultan adopted a liberal policy by offering high offices to Hindus. Indeed, his wazīr, chief of his bodyguard, master of the mint, and his chief physician were Hindus. Rūpā and Sanātan, who became famous later as pious Vaishnavas, held high posts under the sultan. Kṛtibās Ojhā, who translated the *Rāmāyana* into Bengali, is said to have been closely associated with Sanātan. The sultan is said to have shown great respect to Chaitanya.¹⁹ It has been remarked that the principal feature of Hūsain Shāhi rule in Bengal was 'a tendency towards unity among all classes of Hindus and Muslims'. They felt a genuine pride in Bengali culture. The Muslims who came from outside adopted Bengali customs, while the Bengali Hindus learnt Persian to hold administrative positions. This development was reflected in mystical works and in poetry. However, the movement towards cultural synthesis did not eliminate reactionary and revivalist tendencies.²⁰

From the extant biographical information on Hindu officials, it appears that they were appointed from certain areas, particularly the core area of Rarh and from Bāklā (on the Bangladesh coast), a distant border area. The appointments were limited to certain families and their relatives. It is difficult to determine why a particular family was chosen from such a border area. Chittagong had already come under attacks from Tripūrā and Arakan for the control of the seaborne traffic of the Himalayas. Leading Bengali Hindu families could serve as a safeguard against such attacks.

It has been asserted on the basis of Vaishnava literature that Alāuddin Hūsain Shāh oppressed the Brahmans of Nadiā.²¹ A careful scrutiny would show that the incident in question had occurred when Jālāluddin Fateh Shāh was the ruler (before the birth of Chaitanya in 1486). Moreover, the incident seems to have arisen out of a strong rumour, emanating from the Brahmans of Nadiā, that a Brahman would be the next king at Gauṛ. The policy of Alāuddin Hūsain Shāh, except in the case of Sūbūdhi Roy, the Chaudhury of Gauṛ, who had whipped Alāuddin when he was a mere labourer,²² had been to promote the Hindus to high posts. This was perhaps due to his inconclusive wars with Assam, Tripūrā, and Orissa, and the aggressive policy adopted by the Arakan rulers.

A secular stance can be seen in numismatic and epigraphic evidence. The rulers before Hūsain Shāh used to take the Islamic title of 'the helper of Islam and the Muslims'. But Alāuddin, though of Arab origin, departed from this tradition and did not use such titles in his coins. Even the *kālimā* appears only in a few coins. The names of the first four caliphs appear only in one coin.²³ Though we do not find many Hindus occupying high positions in the government under Nuṣrat Shāh, son of Alāuddin, or under his son Ghiyāsuddin Māhmūd III, they did not revert to Islamic ideology. Alāuddin's policy of

giving political power to the Hindus faded away, perhaps to the detriment of the Hūsain Shāhi dynasty.

III

From the viewpoint of social change, the growth of the Muslim community in Bengal was one of the most important developments from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries. Muslim society in Bengal had begun to grow with the arrival of Bakhtyār Khalji's troops, followed by the governors and iqtādārs from Delhi, as well as scholars and religious persons from several places. According to Minhāj, the people of the Khalji tribe flocked around Bakhtyār, but from the end of the thirteenth century, Ilberi Turks, driven out of power at Delhi, began to migrate to Bengal, creating a new nobility. Under the Tūghluqs, immigrants came from distant places. Among them was Hāji Iliyās who came from Sijistān, and founded a new dynasty.²⁴ Arab traders probably had been coming much earlier, although there is no record of their settling in Bengal. The Mongol invasion of Central Asia could have added to the migration of many artisans, merchants, and scholars.

The Ethiopians came during the second half of the fifteenth century, followed by the Afghans who remained in Bengal even after the Mūghal conquest. It may be presumed that once the sultanate was established and overseas commerce was resumed, Persian and Arab merchants also came to Bengal. Like the Arabs, the Persians seemed to have settled at Chittagong.

There are plenty of legends about the role of the Sufis in conversion, particularly of the lower classes, to Islam in Bengal.²⁵ At least one poet suggests that conversion of the lower classes to Islam was due to their oppression by the Brahmanical rulers of Bengal against which *dharma* began to appear in the guise of Islam.²⁶ Some of the higher-class Hindus joined Islam, like Jadū, son of Raja Ganesha, who was appointed sultan as Jālālūddin Mūhammad after his conversion. The case of the Pirālī Brahmins in the Khūlnā region (now in Bangladesh) may also be cited.²⁷ Barbosa's reference to the lure of money or higher position as motivation for conversion may be seen in this context.²⁸ Many Muslim immigrants took local wives and there was no stigma attached to the children of mixed marriages. Some of them were appointed to higher posts, as in the case of the ancestors of Muhammad Khān, a seventeenth-century Bengali poet of distinction. Several members of his family played an important part in the political and cultural life of Bengal.²⁹

Perhaps the earliest reference to different Muslim groups in Bengal could be seen in the proclamation issued by Firoz Shāh Tughlūq during his invasion of Bengal in the second half of the fourteenth century, dividing Muslims into groups such as Khāns, Māliks, Umārā, Sadrs, Akābar, Māārif, Sāadat, Ulāmā, and Māshāikh. Obviously, these groups of people were influential in society and their cooperation was sought by Firoz in his war against Sultan Sikandar Shāh. Firoz promised to enhance their fiefs, villages, lands, stipends, wages, and salaries, suggesting that these groups had considerable income and did not belong to the lower sections of the society.³⁰

A description of the upper strata of the Muslim society in Bengal was given by Bipradās Piplāi around 1494–95. He refers to the Muslim population of Saptagrām as Mongol, Pathan, Mākhdūm, Saiyid, Mūllā and Qāzi, all termed yavanas by him, but mixing the racial with professional attributes. Interestingly, Mākhdūms, who were Shaikhs, were given a status equal to that of the Mongols and Pāthāns (Afghans), who wielded authority.³¹ Since the poem of Bipradās suffers from interpolations, it would be difficult to accept fully the

arrival of the Pāthāns as a group in Bengal at this stage. By implication, though, the existence of converted Muslims in the court of a Muslim zamindār in a village is recognized. It is interesting to note that the poet describes the wealthy city of Saptagrām as one where Hindus were worshipping their gods and the Muslims were following their vocations peacefully.³² The term 'Mongol' appears to have been used as a generic term for Muslim soldiers as distinct from religious people and scholars. In a recent work such use of terms by the Hindu writers has been shown in the case of western India.³³ There remains the possibility, however, that Mongols did come to Bengal from Delhi to form a separate group.

Significantly, Muslims were seen by Bipradās as racially different from the Hindus, but not communally distinct as a separate group. The list of names given by Bipradās would suggest the existence of different classes of Muslims in the countryside, as he refers to a Muslim peasant having a slave. The reference to tobacco is of course a later interpolation, but the darbār of a Muslim rural magnate,³⁴ imitating the sultan, would present a contrast to the simpler Hindu zamindārs who are without much paraphernalia in some Bengali poems. Vijay Gūpta's reference to the wearing of the turban by the Mūllā, as a distinctive dress, is supported by the evidence of the Chinese delegates in the early fifteenth century, though the Chinese do not mention it specifically as a Muslim article of dress.³⁵ Barbosa does so in the early sixteenth century, and Mūkūndarām later describes the ten-fold cap of the Muslims.³⁶ However, the cap can be considered the headgear of the Muslim theologians in Bengal, as in north India.³⁷

A description of the lower classes of Muslims in Bengal has been given by Mūkūndarām. In his imaginary city of Gūjarāt, Mūkūndarām places the Muslims in the western part of the city, thus showing his knowledge of the veneration of the Indian Muslims for Mecca. He divides them into three groups namely, Saiyid, Mūghal, and Qāzi. The last one had become synonymous with a certain group of people having specialized functions. Unlike Bipradās, Mūkūndarām clearly mentions Mūghal (in Bengali 'Mogol'). The reference to *pīrs* and their devotion to the *Quran* is made respectfully by the Hindu poet. He also refers to their 'Kāmboj dress', bald head, and beard coming down to the chest. They wore ten-fold caps while the Muslim women wore pyjāmās, possibly *sālwār* and *kāmīz*. Mūkūndarām also mentions four distinct groups of Afghans (called Pāthāns by him): Lohāni, Sābāni, Lodāni, and Sūrwanī. The Mūllās used to earn some cowries for presiding over the killing of chicken and calf, while the Maulavi (Mākhdūm) used to teach the children. No resentment is shown about the killing of the cow.³⁸

Mūkūndarām has given the occupational names of lower-class Muslims. Some of them were Hindu converts, and did not follow the Muslim religion according to him. Among these people one could see the milkman (*goālā*), the weaver (*jolā* or *jolāhā*), the baker (*pīthārī*), and the fishmonger (*kabārī*). The poet then states that the converted Muslims are called *gorsāl*, taken by Abdul Karim as *gol-sāz*, that is, the fireworks manufacturer. This may be far-fetched, but there were paper manufacturers (*kāgazi*), dyers (*rangrez*), tailor (*dorji*), butchers, and sellers of beef (*kasārī*), and those who performed circumcisions (*hājjam*). The *qālāndar* or the wandering dervishes were also included among the occupational people of the Muslim community.³⁹

Most of these professional and occupational groups continued down to modern times and had obviously become hereditary groups. That these converted people had continued to follow their old Hindu practices has been stated by the poet, who calls some of them, like the fishmongers, liars.⁴⁰ It is clear however that these groups belonged to the lower classes as distinct from the upper classes, the latter following the usual high style of living in northern India.

Shaikh Mūshtāqī, a companion of Hūmāyūn, marvelled at the beautiful palaces of the nobles with gardens, fountains of water, and the extensive use of Chinese tiles on the floors and walls of the rooms covered by luxurious curtains.⁴¹ The ruins of two hāmmāms in Pāndūā still bear witness to the lavish marble-based bathing rooms, with separate hot and cold water running through the pipes set inside the walls studded with coloured stones.⁴² That the upper-class Muslims used to live in a state of luxury is mentioned by Barbosa. They lived in brick houses with flat roofs, had bathing tanks attached to their houses, and used to eat sumptuous food. They wore rings studded with jewels and sported daggers in their girdles. Barbosa also mentions a kind of drink made from palm tree (*tāri* in Bengali), which was consumed by upper-class ladies also.⁴³ Drinking wine was quite common. According to Mā Hūān a century earlier, there were many wine shops in the towns of Bengal.⁴⁴

Polygamy and concubinage were widely practised by the sultan and the Muslim nobility, as reported by an anonymous Portuguese writer in 1521,⁴⁵ and repeated by Barros in his *Da Asia*.⁴⁶ Barbosa also found three to four wives as well as concubines among the upper-class people. Most of these women used to live in their houses and wore silk apparel with gold and silver ornaments.⁴⁷ At the same time, contemporary Bengali writers, particularly Bipradās and Vijay Gūpta, refer to pious Muslims who went to mosques and *mādrāsās*.⁴⁸

The Muslim community in Bengal grew to a great extent due to the untiring efforts of the Sufi orders. Whether the Sufis had preceded Bakhtiyār in Bengal is not important; what is interesting is that these Sufis went into the interior areas, both in Banga and Raḥ, much before the new state had established the symbols of its power. Richard Eaton has shown the ambiguity of the relationship between the state and the Sufi establishments. Contrary to the popular belief that Islam was spread with the *Quran* in one hand and the sword in the other, there is no evidence to suggest that the Sufi saints destroyed Hindu temples. Eaton concedes, however, that some of them, like the celebrated Shāh Jālāl Tābrezi, whom Ibn Baṭṭūta saw in his isolated splendour in the hills of Sylhet, did not come with religious motives only. The Sufis generally settled down as proprietors of land and married local women, 'gradually integrating with the local society'. While most of the Sufi orders looked towards Central Asia, the Chishti order was thoroughly indigenized. Akhi Sirājuddīn was the first Bengal-born Muslim to adopt Sufism under Nizāmuddīn Auliya, the great saint of Delhi. He returned to Bengal sometime after 1325 and authorized his disciple Alā ul-Haq to help Iliyās Shāh in his bid for the independence of Bengal, which from the sufi point of view was the will of god. The Chishti order of saints, living close to the capital, played the role of a catalyst. Shaikh Alā ul-Haq's celebrated son Nūr Qūtb-Alam approached the Sharqi ruler of Jaunpūr to drive out Raja Ganesha from power. The formation of an independent state, ruled by a Muslim, was helped by the Chishtis, a departure from the other sufi orders who had penetrated into the interior. It is important to note that the undercurrent of tension between 'dīn' (religion) and 'dūniyā' (world), between the ruler and the religious head, often erupted into open hostility.⁴⁹

Several Sufi orders entered Bengal in the wake of the Turkish conquest and established their *khānqāhs* in different parts, influencing the religious life of the Muslims in various ways. Mūkūndarām refers to *qālāndars* as a sect. The governors of Dhaka permitted their annual festivals.⁵⁰ Alāol's *Padmāvat*, which relates the familiar legends of the Prophet's life and other accounts of the Muslim faith, reveals the influence of Hindu ideas and beliefs, as the poet admits the existence of lesser deities, a departure from the strict theology of Islam.⁵¹ The poet refers to idols as shadows of god, while his work shows his knowledge of Hindu mythology. However, elsewhere in his work the worship of a formless god is

emphasized to suggest the superiority of Islam.⁵² The *sūbādārs* and other high Muslim nobles patronized *mādrāssās*, mosques and the *ulāma*.

Throughout the medieval period in Bengal many Muslim saints were venerated by the Hindus. According to some scholars, the acceptance of Haridās, a Muslim, as a disciple by Chaitanya brought a rapprochement in which devotion to god partly obliterated other differences. The Hindus could show devotion to a Muslim *pir*, with followers from both the communities. Not all the *pirs* came from amongst the *sufis*; the *yogis* and *tāntric* saints attracted ordinary people to no small degree.⁵³

The Chinese visitors to Bengal carried the impression that 'all the people in the country are Muslims'.⁵⁴ They seemed to be talking of the nobility. In any case, they also noticed that, though a few nobles used Persian in their homes, the majority of them used the Bengali language. Thus, it appears that there was Islamization of court etiquette, while even the Muslim nobles were indigenized in terms of language and local customs.⁵⁵ Amidst these apparently antagonistic forces, the presence of the larger Hindu component of the society was palpable. Thus, before the rise of Iliyās Shāh, Ibn Baṭṭūta observed that around Sonārgāon the people were 'infidels under Muslim rule'.⁵⁶ The Chinese visitors to Bengal in the early fifteenth century observed that most men wore turbans and sheepskin leather shoes; their garments were a combination of round-collared robes and *dhoti* or *lūṅgi*. Incidentally, they did not see any tension in the Bengali society on their way from Chittagong to Pandua.⁵⁷

IV

At the end of the twelfth century Bengali society was predominantly Hindu. Dominant were big landlords and high bureaucrats. The landless represented the other end of the scale, lacking the basic capital to exploit agrarian resources. Most of the landless labourers were regarded as untouchable. Different grades of landowners were in the middling rungs. The songs composed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, in mixed Bengali and Prakrit, refer to the simple way of life among the hunters and the *doms*. Artisans and traders were also there in the society, but trade was not an important source of wealth. A large number of Brahmans, patronized by the state or the landowners, used to give rulings in social and religious matters. Brahmanical influence in terms of the *varṇa* system and rules of untouchability had begun to be felt with the rise of the Senas. This perhaps explains the lack of support from all classes of people for the Sena rulers, and the easy victory of Bakhtyār Khalji.⁵⁸

The Muslim rulers did not interfere in the caste system in which the Brahmans, Vaidyas, and Kāyasthas were considered as higher castes. Some of the *Puranas* listed mixed castes due to mixed marriages. Even the Shudras were divided into 'sat' and 'asat'. Since occupations were integrated into a vast cooperative arrangement based on caste, there was little mobility within the system. There is no reason to believe that the Turkish conquest softened the rigour; on the contrary, it made it far more rigorous. However, some forms of mobility in the social system came with the passage of time.

The conquest of Nadiā by Bakhtyār Khalji and the issuing of coin from the mint of Lakhnauti did not change the overall economic structure. From the early fourteenth century, however, change becomes noticeable. A number of mint towns began to appear on the trade routes. The increasing role of Bengali merchants in south-eastern trade, along with that of others, was also in evidence. This would not suggest the separation of artisans

from their close attachment to priestly estates. The predominantly agrarian economy remained stable throughout, though commodity production in certain areas could be noticed.⁵⁹

Small towns on the bank of the *Bhāgirathi* were being settled upon by people emigrating from eastern Bengal from the late fifteenth century onwards. Between 1470 and 1480 five mosques were constructed in Gaur within a radius of 10 miles, and another was built outside the wall. While most of these people had come to Nadia from Pandua, other people, including the parents of Chaitanya, came from Sylhet, then under famine. It appears that people from Sylhet had already settled in a certain locality of the town. There were also people from Orissa, possibly from Cuttack, with whom Chaitanya quarrelled in the beginning. By the middle of the sixteenth century the towns were in the process of becoming production centres of textile with weavers setting up their looms nearby. The *Bhāgirathi* valley was dotted with small market towns, chiefly dependent upon textile production and sale.⁶⁰

The rise of Saptagrām (Sātgaon) had obviously helped the process. The euologistic description of Saptagrām as a port town, where rich merchants had constructed big houses, suggests its growth as a part of the increasing trade nexus as an alternative to Chittagong, which was under the attacks of the Arakanese and the Portuguese.⁶¹ The shifting of the focus of trade and the establishment of production centres on the *Bhāgirathi* must have brought a large number of artisans, mostly weavers, to settle on the river bank, along with merchants, to invest both in housing and trade. The existence of a large number of Muslims, possibly artisans, at Nadiā, a classical centre of Sanskrit learning, required the presence of a qāzi, with whom Chaitanya had a brush in the wake of the growth of Vaishnavism.⁶²

Observations made by foreign visitors to Bengal and the works of contemporary Bengali writers throw a good deal of light on the socio-economic and cultural life in Bengal from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century. Ibn Baṭṭūṭā observed that the peasants in Bengal were paying more than half of their produce as tax.⁶³ It seems that the prices prevailing in Bengal were far lower than the prices prevailing in Delhi.⁶⁴ The Chinese delegations to Bengal in the early fifteenth century saw shops on both sides of the long street from the river to the city of Pānduā, selling all kinds of goods, including cotton textiles. The last delegate, Mā Hūān, who visited Bengal in 1436, refers to mulberry trees and silk weaving. It appears that this industry was not very old. The artisans did not know the system of drawing silk floss. However, they produced hemsilk in abundance. Some of the finest varieties of paper were manufactured from the bark of the mulberry trees.⁶⁵ An anonymous Portuguese writer refers to the expansion of the city of Gaur around 1521. There was abundance of food and other goods in different markets of the city. There is no indication, however, that the Bengali merchants were participating in overseas trade.⁶⁶

Writing at the end of the fifteenth century, Bipradās Piplāi testifies to the existence of thirty-six castes in the emerging township of Saptagrām. His description suggests the social structure of an orthodox Hindu town.⁶⁷ A century later Mūkūndarām depicts an imaginary city in which one could see the operation of two parallel forces at work: the market economy and the traditional *jājmāni* system. His city was in a way similar to Gaur and Nadiā so far as the location of different occupational groups was concerned. He put the artisans at the end of the city, while certain occupational groups were placed outside the city. Among these were the Malangis (called *Māl* here), who lived by selling salt, and the Doms who collected wood for cremation and manufactured straw hats for the peasants. At Nadiā the artisans, weavers, flower-sellers and other poor people were settled at one end of the city

while the Muslims were living in Mollapara (a ward of the Mullas), the only exclusive area on the edge of the city. There were weekly markets (called *hāts*) where people earned their living by buying and selling. For crossing the river, boatmen collected royal taxes. The grass-cutter cut grass for a few cowries, imported from the Maldives and used it as a medium of exchange for petty transactions. The tailor, obviously a Muslim, was located at one end of the city. Sweetmeats sold from door to door reflected peddling activities in the otherwise static artisanal system.⁶⁸

That the middle-class professional groups had emerged as an important element could be seen in the disparaging remarks of Mukundaram on the physicians who fled from the serious patients and on the goldsmith (*subāṇabānīks*) who drained away the wealth of their customers. But there is no mention of teachers in this city. They were quite numerous in Nadia, living on the tuition fees of students. The arrival of educated Kayasthas, in contrast to their absence in Nadia, makes the city of Mukundaram closer to Gaur to which he refers as a place of artisanal manufacture. Mūkūndarām refers to the arrival of 700 Brahmans with their students, who performed rituals for their clients after a bit of learning. In return they got various commodities like rice, sweetmeats, curds, oil, etc. The traditional system of exchange, mostly prevalent in villages, could be seen in Mūkūndarām's perception of the Bengali Hindu society at the beginning of the Mūghal conquest.⁶⁹

In early Vaishnava poetry of Bengal, the qāzi appears to be the most hated man. Vijay Gūpta, who clearly visualized the domination of Brahmans at the end of the fifteenth century, refers to a violent conflict between Hindus and Muslims. However, the poet eulogizes the sultan.⁷⁰ Vrindaban Das, one of the earliest Vaishnava poets of the sixteenth century, refers to a violent conflict between Chaitanya's followers and the qāzi of Nadia. In the early seventeenth century, Kṛishnadās Kaviraj, the leading Vaishnava biographer of Chaitanya, turns the incident into a verbal duel between the qāzi and Chaitanya.⁷¹ This would suggest a closer integration of the two leading communities of Bengal. The growth of Bengali culture may be seen as reflecting integration, like the Bengali language, which incorporated Arabic, Persian, and Portuguese words.⁷² The religious animosity that one notices at the end of the sultanate period was a part of the political and economic crisis on the eve of the merger of an independent polity into the Mūghal empire.

In Mūkūndarām's imaginary city peasants were not oppressed. Balarām Mandal, an affluent peasant, gives *pāttās* to the peasants and advances cash for the construction of houses and purchase of cows. No tax is required to be paid for three years and no *sālāmi* is required. However, the 'greedy' Kāyasthas have entered the service of the government, probably in the revenue department, and their land is not measured. Mūkūndaram does not mention settlement of merchants in the city, but he does mention Vaishya mahajans. The Vaishnavas are mentioned as peasants and sellers of precious stones. The merchants of Saptagram sit at home and get the profits. Mukundaram gives a list of Bengali Hindu merchants from different places in Bengal, who seem to be inland traders.⁷³

From the works of the contemporary Bengali poets like Bipradās and Vijay Gūpta, it may appear that the Brahmans remained content with religious studies and teaching. But some of them did not consider it beneath their dignity to work for the sultan, like Rup and Sanātan before they were converted to Vaishnavism. This was approved of in the case of extreme poverty by Raghunandan in his *Smṛiti*, written in the first half of the sixteenth century.⁷⁴ This was perhaps a minor change in the otherwise unchangeable caste rules since the pre-Islamic days. The rise of the Kāyasthas in government jobs was seen by the Vaishnava poets as a change due perhaps to their large number and the privileges they had begun to enjoy, often by cunning.⁷⁵

The position of the Hindu woman had undergone very little change through the centuries. The kitchen was the place where she was 'master'. Lower-class women, however, could do outdoor work, and could help the husband in weaving. It has been asserted that the weaving of *muslin*, the legendary cotton textile of Bengal, was done by both Hindu and Muslim women. The *Smārta* rules do not give any right to women to inherit property. The *Dayābhāg* of Jimūtbāhana gives no right even to widows to sell, mortgage and give property, except *śṛidhana*, in gift. Raghūnandan's *Smṛiti* allows divorce to women only on certain conditions. He gives a special place to women in the household, generally in a joint family. The Vaishnava authors harp on love and affection between the married couple. While the participation of women in socio-religious ceremonies was restricted under the *Smṛiti*, the Vaishnavas gave a position to the wife that was better than the one in the traditional Hindu society.⁷⁶

Bengali literature began to emerge before the end of the fifteenth century. There are palpable differences between the language of the twelfth and that of the fifteenth century. Apart from evolution, the principal reason of change was the influence of Persian, and to some extent that of Arabic, on the Bengali language. The administrative lexicons were beginning to replace the Sanskrit terminology; a mixed language was developing by the middle of the fifteenth century or even earlier.⁷⁷ This was Sanskritized by the influence of Chaitanya from the sixteenth century onwards, but it was to turn back to Persian after the Mughal conquest.

There was a revival of Sanskrit literature, limited due to two aspects: classical literature, and the *Navya Nyāya* and *Smṛiti*. The Brahmans, who lost political power with the advent of the sultanate, turned to speculative branches of knowledge through the classical language. With the conquest of eastern Bengal by the sultans and with Chaitanya's movement seemingly taking away the cream of the middle class, the *Smṛiti* texts, particularly of Raghūnandan, were intended to save the Hindu *dharma* from impurity. It was an attempt to formulate the Hindu religio-legal system with the basic knowledge of *nyāya*; it had a tremendous impact upon the Hindu society of Bengal. There was great emphasis on the revival of the classical system to meet the challenge of equality posed by Islam and Bhakti.⁷⁸

V

At the beginning of the thirteenth century four systems of religious belief and practice were prevalent in Bengal: (a) worship of village gods, both Vedic and non-Vedic; (b) a local variety of Mahāyāna Buddhism; (c) Jogi practices linked to *Shaiva* beliefs; and (d) Puranic Brahmanism in which Brahmā, *Shiva*, and *Chandī* were dominant. After the Turkish conquest these four systems coalesced into two basic systems based on the Puranas and traditional non-Puranic beliefs. With the coming of the Muslim faith, there was merger of some gods and goddesses of Mahāyāna Buddhism into Brahmanic worship. In villages *Dharma* became the popular god and *Manasā*, the ruler of the world of the snakes, became the popular goddess.⁷⁹

Apart from the advent of Islam in Bengal, both in its orthodox and Sufi manifestations, the most important religious movement in Bengal, was initiated by Chaitanya. Among other things, his movement resulted eventually in a new form of literature, the biographical, in which man was glorified rather than God. The Vaishnava movement in Bengal broke the monopoly of the Brahmans to be the gurus. The rigour of caste rules was relaxed and the ideas of untouchability were modified to a great extent. The attitudes of the protagonists of Vaishnavism influenced the social attitudes of the *Shāktas*.⁸⁰

The ideology of Chaitanya, which was marked by the absence of Brahman priests and complicated rituals, enabled the lower castes and classes to gain more equality and dignity than what was ever given to them by Brahman-dominated social regulations. The increasing production and sale, with the consequent influx of money brought by Indian merchants as well as by the Portuguese, required closer integration and coordination between production and sale. This was provided by Chaitanya in the market towns on the *Bhāgirathi* by giving equal rights to the producer, the people in the service sector, and the merchant-distributor in a new social order.⁸¹

While Chaitanya was converting the lower-class artisans and service people of Nabadwip, the spread of Brahmanical influence in the *Rarh* region can be seen in *Mūkūndarām*'s work at the end of the sixteenth century. He visualizes a social structure different from that of eastern Bengal. His simple narrative of tribal hunters living on the edge of the forest was punctuated by the establishment of an imaginary city, called *Gūjarat*, that showed the pattern of new settlement in the *Rarh* region. The bandits and tribals are termed by the high-caste *Mūkūndarām* as *chūārs*, whose water is not to be touched by anybody.⁸²

The Vaishnava movement failed to dislodge the older religious cults like the *Shākta*-*Tāntric* or even the local deities. It could influence the lower classes in the western part of Bengal, but in eastern Bengal the majority of the lower as well as higher classes remained firm in the old faiths. However, by its insistence on vegetarian food and prohibition on drinking alcohol, the Vaishnava movement was able to free the upper-class converts from various social abuses. After Chaitanya the growth of the Vaishnava *Sahajiyā* cult, with a mixture of the *Rādhā*-*Kṛishṇa* cult and tantric-yogic practices, introduced some perverse practices among the humbler folks. The bulk of the Hindu masses continued to worship the Puranic gods and goddesses. *Shiva* and *Vishṇū* were regularly worshipped in temples. *Dūrgā*, *Lakshmi*, *Saraswati*, and others were celebrated at annual festivals. Some of the *tāntric* deities, like *Chandi*, assumed special forms in certain localities, reflecting a mixture of *tāntric* and local religious beliefs. Such deities constituted the Bengali folk religion. *Dharma* occupied the most prominent position, aligned with *Vishṇū*, *Brahmā*, and *Shiva* in certain areas.⁸³

There was a varied pantheon of other deities, in which *Manasā* or the snake goddess appeared to be important. Some of the other deities were associated with disease, and with tigers and crocodiles. Orthodox Hinduism, as codified by *Raghūnandan* in his *Smṛiti*, often appropriates such deities at lower levels of the pantheon. The daily life of the people was coloured by the fear of the supernatural. The practice of black magic figures widely in contemporary Bengali poetry. Even the Vaishnava biographical works like the *Rasikamangala*, and the lawgiver *Raghūnandan* were not free from belief in supernatural power or the use of a particular food on certain days to ward off the evil eye. The contemporary Muslims were not exempt either, as *Mirzā Nāthān* gives ample examples of in his *Bāhāristān-i Ghāibī*.⁸⁴

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- 2 Satish Chandra, *Medieval India: From Sultanate to the Mughals* (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1997), p. 43. Cf. Minhāj, *Tabāqat-i Nāsiri*, pp. 16–18.

- 3 Habibullah, *Foundation of Muslim Rule in India*, pp. 74–7; Chandra, *Medieval India*, pp. 43–4. Cf. Minhāj, *Tabāqat-i Nāsiri*, pp. 55–9.
- 4 Habibullah, *ibid.*, pp. 99–100; Chandra, *ibid.*, p. 44.
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- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 129–31.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 172–5.
- 8 Habibullah, *Foundation of Muslim Rule in India*, pp. 191–2; Chandra, *Medieval India*, p. 62.
- 9 Chandra, *ibid.*, pp. 209–10; S.A.A. Rizvi, *The Wonder that was India* (Part II) (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1987), p. 57.
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- 15 *Ibid.*, pp. 287.
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CHAPTER 19

North-East India: State and Society

J.B. Bhattacharjee

I

North-eastern India, covering the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura, has a geographical area of 99,642 square miles, or 2,55,09,000 hectares, with 2,625 miles of international boundary with Bangladesh, Myanmar, China (including former Tibet), and Bhutan. It is connected with the rest of India by the narrow 'Siliguri neck' of around 10 miles in north Bengal. The region may be divided broadly into three physical divisions: the north-eastern and central hills tracts, the valley of the Brahmaputra (Assam proper), and the valley of the Barak. On the north of the Brahmaputra valley lies the Eastern Himalayas. Various parts of the sub-Himalayan region are named after the tribes who inhabit the hills, like the Akas, Nishis, Adis, Mishings, and Mishmis. The Assam range in the middle of the region is occupied from the east to the west by various tribes like the Nagas, Karbis, Dimasas, Jaintias, Khasis, and Garos. The southern hill range, inhabited by the Mizos and the tribes of Tripura, merges in the Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh. The region was linked with the neighbouring countries since early times by several land routes. Assam was linked with China and Myanmar through Manipur and the sub-Himalayan Arunachal hills; the Cachar-Burma route passed through Manipur, while Naga hills, Manipur, and Tripura had intimate geographical proximity with Myanmar. These routes helped migration of the Indo-Mongoloid racial elements from South-East Asia and China into the region. However, the most frequented route was on the west (the valley of the Brahmaputra and the Ganga).¹

Hill areas constitute the larger portion of the region. Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland are hill states, while Assam, Manipur, and Tripura contain hills and plains. The Brahmaputra and Barak valleys up to the plains of Tripura, are the two major plain tracts connected with north Bengal and south-east Bengal respectively. The Manipur valley is encircled by hills, barring the narrow trans-Barak basin, which connects it with the Barak valley. The Brahmaputra valley, which is the largest plain tract in the north-east, extends for about 375 miles from Sadiya in the east to Dhubri in the west where the

river turns towards the south to enter Bangladesh along the western edge of Meghalaya. The breadth of the valley is only about 47 miles. Barring the narrow neck that links it with the Bengal plains near Dhubri, the valley is bordered by the Meghalaya plateau or Assam range, Naga hills, Arunachal hills, and the Bhutan hills like a garland. The valley of the Brahmaputra is separated from the Barak valley by the Assam range. The Barak valley–Tripura plain tract is also bounded on three sides by the North Cachar hills, Manipur hills, Mizo hills, and Tripura hills. On the fourth side it merges with the plains districts of Bangladesh. The hills division of the north-east starts from the western slopes of the Garo hills, followed by the Khasi-Jaintia hills and North Cachar hills; it then joins the Karbi hills, Naga hills, and Arunachal hills. The Mizo hills and the adjoining hills in Myanmar also form a mountain chain in continuation of the Assam range.²

The region is the homeland of a large number of ethnic and cultural groups with different languages and dialects, religions, and customs. The Assamese and the Bengali are the two large language groups. The Brahmaputra valley is predominantly Assamese speaking, and the Barak valley Bengali speaking. Tripura is a Bengali-majority state, the concentration of Bengali population being in the plain portion of the state. The Barak valley, Tripura plains, and the Goalpara area of Lower Assam traditionally bordered Bengal, and this explains the linguistic situation in those parts of the region. The Manipur valley is a Meitei homeland. The hill areas of the north-east are predominantly tribal and the tribes are numerous. A small number of non-tribals settled in the hills in the British period for trade and professions. Until then, these areas were populated by tribals only. Besides the hills, there are pockets of tribal concentration in the Brahmaputra valley. In the Barak valley, the tribal population has been very small throughout the recorded period of history. However, the Indo-Mongoloid and the Indo-Aryan people have been living in the north-east since early times. The Indo-Aryan settlements extended to the valleys of the Brahmaputra and the Barak through north Bengal and south-east Bengal, respectively, in their eastward march to the farthest limits of the ploughable land and across the Barak valley, and on a small scale even to the Manipur valley. The Indo-Mongoloids came from various parts of East and South-East Asia through the Tibetan, Chinese, and the Burmese routes, which were also used for trade and commerce. The hill areas were inhabited entirely by the Indo-Mongoloids till the end of the medieval period, while in the plains the Indo-Aryans and the Indo-Mongoloids lived side by side and a process of cultural assimilation spontaneously came into operation. The people of the plains and the hills interacted in the markets in the foothills in the form of barter trade, and these markets generated mutual cultural influences.³

II

The settlement pattern brought distinct culture zones into existence, and ultimately the political divisions in the region. The earliest state formation processes were noticed in the Brahmaputra valley where the Varmana rulers of Kāmarupa had the pride of establishing a powerful 'early state' during the fifth to seventh centuries AD. The Sālāsthambha dynasty, which in all probability emerged from a 'Hinduized' tribal base, flourished between the seventh and the tenth centuries.⁴ The Barak valley–Tripura plains division was covered by state formation processes in south-east Bengal, like Samatata, Harikela, and Vanga: 'Srihattamandala' denoted the regional identity of this division. A portion of the valley formed part of Kāmarupa during fifth to seventh centuries, as is known from the Nidhanpur

copperplates of Bhāskara Varmana. The Tipperah and the Kalapur inscriptions of Samanta Lokanatha and Samanta Marudanatha respectively of Samatata, belonging to the seventh and eighth centuries, make references to land grants to Brāhmanas and temples in the Sylhet–Cachar region. In the tenth century the Chandra rulers of Bikrampur (Vanga or east Bengal) ruled over the region as evidenced by the Paschimbhāg copperplates of Sri Chandra.⁵ The Meitei state formation in Manipur also started before the tenth century. The early states in the region were either of Brahmanical origin or they emerged from the indigenous tribal bases through Brahmanical influence as the ruling tribal clans were accorded Kshatriya status in the Hindu society. The early states in the Brahmaputra valley were rooted in the lower Assam region bordering Bengal, and most of these states covered parts of north Bengal, and even eastern Bengal. State formation in the Barak valley and the development of this area as a distinct culture zone were the result of Indo-Aryan settlements in the valley that extended spontaneously from Bengal. The Tripuri state formation also started in Cachar where they had their first capital, then they moved to Sylhet, and finally to Tripura (the territory to which they gave their name). Similarly, the Meitei state was as much a product of the indigenous development and mutual adjustments of the endogamous clans for territorial formations in the Manipur valley under the Ningthouja chiefs as a product of their interaction with the neighbouring states and the diffusion of pan-Indian ideas of kingship. The Bishnupriyas, who established the petty Bishnupur kingdom in Manipur before the rise of the Meitei kingdom, had migrated from Rangamati.⁶

The states and societies of the earlier periods continued in North-East India in the tenth century. In the Barak valley, Srihatta continued to be a mandala of the Pundravardhana bhukti under the Chandra rulers as evidenced by the Paschimbagh copperplate of Sri Chandra. The Chandra rule perhaps declined in the area by the end of the tenth century. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the Srihattarājya of the Deva rulers of Bhātera flourished in the Sylhet–Cachar region. The boundary of the Srihattarājya, as it is understood from the two Bhātera copperplates, extended to the foot of the hill range and the donated villages, mentioned in the inscriptions, are still scattered over the region as well as the Kailashahar–Dharmanagar area of Tripura. The Srihattarājya declined in the thirteenth century and a process of disintegration was inaugurated by the rise of the smaller states like Gaur, Laur, and Jayantiā in the lower region (Sylhet) of the valley, while the upper region (Cachar) and the Kailashahar–Dharmanagar area had passed under the Tripuris. There were also some smaller states in the lower region, like Itā, Pratapgarh, Deorāli, Bhānugāch, Taraf, Jagannāthpur, and Bāniāchang, which were partly autonomous and partly tributary, either to Gaur or to Laur.⁷

In the Brahmaputra valley the rule of the Sālasthambha or Mlechcha dynasty declined by the beginning of the tenth century as the last king Tyāgasimha died in 900 without leaving an heir. The Pāla dynasty was then founded by Brahmapāla when the people elected him to be their king. Ratnapāla, Indrapāla, Dharmapāla, and Jayapāla were important Pāla kings who ruled over a large and prosperous state and granted land to Brāhmanas and temples. The dynasty of Brahmapāla came to an end with the death of Jayapāla around 1100. The reign of Tingyadeva (1110–26) and Vaidyadeva (1126–40) of the solar dynasty in Kāmarupa is known from epigraphic records. Another inscription recorded the reigns of four kings of the lunar dynasty, namely, Bhāskara, Rāyārideva, Udayakarna, and Vallabhadeva in succession till the end of the eleventh century.⁸ By then the ancient Kamarupa had already disintegrated. The Khen rulers in Kāmrup (Kamarupa) and Kamatapur ruled till about the fifteenth century. These two states were at times under a common ruler. The Kamatapur state included parts of north Bengal. In upper Assam, the Morans and the

Chutiya established their principalities while the Barāhis ruled in the Kapili valley. The emergence of the Bara Bhuyāns, or twelve independent landlords, in central Assam was another significant development in the thirteenth century. Chandibar, the great grandfather of Sankaradeva, was one of the Bāra Bhuyāns.⁹

The political disintegration of the Brahmaputra valley after the fall of the Pālas encouraged the invaders. When the Turks occupied Bengal in the thirteenth century, Kāmrup extended from the Karatoya in the west to modern Darrang and Nagaon districts of Assam in the east. The Turkish rulers were aware of the natural resources of Kāmrup and its importance in Chinese commerce. In fact, the first invasion of Kāmrup was led by Ikhtiyāruddin Muhammad bin Bakhtiyār Khalji who decided to invade Tibet, Turkestan, and China with a grand army of 10,000 well-equipped cavalry. Bakhtiyār's guide was a Mech tribal chief, who was a convert and known as Āli Mech. According to an inscription near Guwahati, the Turks were completely routed by the Kāmrup king. Though futile, this expedition marked the beginning of the settlements of Muslims in Assam. The next expedition by Sultan Ghiyāsuddin Iwāz-i Husain Khalji of Bengal in 1226 could proceed to Nagaon, as it is known from the Gāchtal inscription, where the sultan's army was worsted by Prithu, the Kāmrup king, with heavy losses. Nāsiruddin, the next sultan, invaded Kāmrup in 1228. This time Prithu was defeated and killed and Nāsiruddin appointed a tributary king in Kāmrup.¹⁰

The autonomy of Kāmrup was considerably retrieved during the reign of King Sandhya (1250–70) who was able to establish a strong and prosperous state with his capital at Kāmarupanagara (north Guwahati). It was bound by the Karatoya on the west, the Barnadi on the east, the sub-montane Himalayas on the north and Mymensing on the south. The refusal of Sandhyā to pay tribute provoked another invasion from Bengal. Sultan Mālik Ikhtiyāruddin Yuzbak Tugril Khān himself led the campaign, which reached Guwahati in 1257. Despite initial success, the Bengal army was completely routed in the encounter and the sultan was killed. However, the next invasion of Shāmsuddin Firoz Shah was a rude shock for Kāmrup, which was then reorganized with Kāmatāpur as its capital. Ghiyāsuddin Bahadur Shah advanced to Nagaon in 1322 to be repulsed by the Barāhi (Kachari) king of Kapili valley. In the meantime, the Āhoms had established a powerful state in upper Assam and weakened Kāmrup–Kāmatā by successive attacks. Taking advantage of the situation, Sultan Ilyās Shah of Bengal occupied lower Assam in 1357 and his son and successor Sikandar Shah retained the area under his rule. An attempt made by Indra Narayan, the king of Kāmrup–Kāmatā, together with a few Bhuyān chiefs and the Barāhi king Mahamanikya, failed to dislodge the army of occupation. That Ghiyāsuddin Azam Shah (1393–1410) maintained his hold over the area is supported by literary and numismatic evidence. Kāmrup–Kāmatā regained its autonomy sometime after the decline of the Ilyās Shahi dynasty in Bengal when a Tibeto-Burman Khen dynasty ruled the region with the capital at Kāmatāpur. The successive rulers of the dynasty, Niladhwaj (1400–60), Chakradhwaj (1460–80), and Nilambar (1480–98), held sway from the Karatoya to the Barnadi. During this period also the sultans of Bengal made several attempts to occupy the area. However, it was not until the reign of Sultan Alaūddin Husain Shah (1493–1519) that the Khen kingdom was annexed to Bengal in 1502. The sultan appointed two viceroys, Musundar Ghāzi and Ghiyāsuddin Āuliā in Kāmrup and Hājo respectively, for local administration. Ghiyāsuddin is believed to have founded a Muslim settlement in Kāmrup and built a big mosque at Hājo. Mirzā Nāthan called him a darvesh. Even now Ghiyāsuddin is respected as a saint in Assam and his tomb is frequented by Muslims and Hindus alike.¹¹

In the Barak valley Gaurogovinda, Raja of Gaur (Sylhet), was defeated and killed in 1384 by an army sent by Sultan Firoz Shah of Delhi. The famous Sufi saint Hazrat Shah

Jalal and his 360 *āuliās* accompanied the expedition. Sikandar Shah, a nephew of the sultan, was appointed as the *āmil* of Gaur under the nawāb of Murshidabad. He occupied Taraf and added it to Gaur. Shah Jālāl adopted Sylhet as his home and a dargāh constructed for him is revered even now by the people. In an earlier invasion of Laur by the nawāb of Murshidabad, one Govinda Singha of the royal family was taken to Murshidabad as a prisoner. He was converted to Islam as Govinda Khan and appointed as the tributary ruler of Laur. However, Laur was eventually placed under the *āmil* of Gaur, who was then redesignated the *āmil* of Sylhet. In the meantime, one Sarbānanda, a talented Hindu of Barsalā in Sylhet, was converted to Islam and named Sarwār Khan. He was appointed a minister of the sultan of Bengal and then nawāb of Sylhet. All other minor states in Sylhet were gradually brought under the nawāb and reduced to *zāmindāris*. Sylhet passed under the Mughals with the rest of Bengal during the reign of Akbar in the sixteenth century.¹²

III

The most significant development in North-East India in the medieval period was the emergence of states from the indigenous as well as immigrant tribal social bases. The Āhom, Dimāsā, Jaintiā, Tripuri, Meitei, and Koch were among the most important states that emerged during this period. The social and state formation processes in the region were influenced by its geopolitical structure, which absorbed pan-Indian traditions and the development in South-East Asia. The region had already experienced a fine blending of these two traditions as represented by the Indo-Aryan and Indo-Mongoloid tribal communities. In the case of the Koch, Dimāsā (Kāchāri), Meitei (Manipuri), Jaintiā (Jayantiyā), and the Tripuri, social stratification had surfaced with the emergence of private property on the basis of differentiated landholdings and individual sources of income. The notables at clan or village levels emerged as chiefs and they extended their sphere of dominance by subduing other clans, tribes, and communities. The Āhoms had this experience before their advent in the Brahmaputra valley, and they built the most powerful state in the region by military conquests. The tribes were proclaimed as Kshatriya by the Brāhmanas who also discovered divine origins for the ruling clans. In their final form, the medieval states were able to develop an elaborate apparatus that was strong enough for sustenance and surveillance. Besides the Āhom, Koch (Koch Bihār), Dimāsā, Jaintiā, Meitei, and the Tripuri states, there were some minor states (mostly satellites or splinters of major states) and chieftaincies, which fell to the British in the nineteenth century.¹³

The Āhoms, an offshoot of the Tāi or the Shān race of South-East Asia, had penetrated the Brahmaputra Valley in 1228 under the leadership of Sukāphā through the Pātkai range and set up a principality in upper Assam. In the course of the next three centuries, they reduced the Morāns, Barāhis, and Chutiyās to submission, and pushed the Dimasas (Kācharis) from Dimāpur to Māibong. In the sixteenth century they confronted the rising power of the Koches, Dimāsās, and Jaintiās, and at times forced them to accept the suzerainty of the Āhom monarch. But the most formidable enemy that subsequently challenged the supremacy of the Āhoms were the Mughals with whom the hostilities continued with occasional breaks till the close of the seventeenth century. The Mughal army under Nawāb Mir Jumlāh advanced in 1662 as far as Gargāon, the capital of the Āhom kingdom, and compelled its monarch Jayadhwaj Singha to cede Kāmrup (lower Assam) to the Mughals. Gadbadhar Singha (1681–96) expelled the Mughals in 1682 and extended the boundary of the Āhom state to the river Manas. During the period of Mughal invasions, lower Assam

changed hands several times and because of this some features of the Mughal administration took root in the area. Rudra Singha (1696–1714) organized a common front of the north-eastern states to expel the Mughals from eastern India. Most of these states were his allies or vassals. However, this valiant Āhom monarch passed away in the midst of preparations. By the end of the eighteenth century the monarchy was on the decline. However, the Āhom state was the largest and the most powerful of all the states that emerged in North-East India during this period.¹⁴

After Sukāphā had entered the upper Assam with a few thousand migrants, the Āhoms moved from place to place as a self-governed body of armed peasants in search of a suitable site. They left on the way small colonies at strategic places like Khamjang and Tipam, and the main body finally settled around 1253 on the fertile banks of the river Dikhou (a tributary of the Brahmaputra). The site was possibly selected for its potential for irrigation and cultivation, prospect of raids into the hills for slaves, easy access to salt wells and iron ores, besides the Naga hills range forming a natural rampart for the defence of the settlement. The capital was established at Charaideo, a low hillock, which is still dotted with the ruins of the tombs of the deceased kings, queens, and nobles, and is revered by the Āhoms as a sacred place. On the march, they had accepted Sukāphā as their first king for his qualities as a military leader and his privileged birth in the celestial clan (chāo-phā) from which the Tāis in South-East Asia customarily chose their chiefs. His two chief counsellors, Burhāgohāin and Bargohāin, were chosen from the next two customarily important clans (Chāo-Frongmung and Chāo-Thāomung respectively). There was a corresponding lineage of priests, namely, Bāilung, Deodhāi, and Mohan. These six lineages along with four more, namely, Dihingiā, Sandiqui, Lāhan, and Duārā, constituted the Āhom nobility since Sukāphā's time. They held all the important offices of the state on a hereditary basis. The inscriptions, coins, documents, and chronicles (*Buranji*) were issued and maintained in Tāi-Āhom language. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries this basic and rudimentary structure hardly interacted with any cultural influences from outside the Āhom society. They brought almost the whole of the Brahmaputra valley under their rule during this period. The Āhom militia consisting of several units was divided under the command of Burhāgohāin and Bargohāin, who supplied the daily provisions and manpower needed by the king. The non-Āhom subjects were attached to other nobles and a majority of these subjects remained attached to the king. The states that emerged and fell in the Brahmaputra valley in the earlier periods influenced the formation of the Āhom state even at this rudimentary stage. The Assamese language was gradually adopted for official transactions and the *Buranjis* were rewritten in Assamese. The Brahmanical influence started in the reign of Suhungmung Dihingiā (1497–1539) when he annexed the Chutiyā kingdom and parts of Nagaon, which was then ruled by the Bāra Bhuyāns and the Dimāsā (Barāhi/Kachari) kings. The Āhom king assumed the title of Swarga Nārāyan (Lord of Heaven) and came to be addressed as Swargadeva. Suhungmung introduced the Saka era in official transactions and started striking coins with Hindu legends to mark the coronation. Hindu myths were grafted on Āhom legends with a view to identify the Tāi-Āhom deities with the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. The Brāhmanas accommodated the Āhom legends to declare them as Indra-*vamsi* (Indra identified with Āhom Lemdong), which found its way into the *Buranji*. The later Āhom kings took Hindu names (along with Āhom names). During the reign of Pratāp Singha (1603–41) the Āhom diplomats were replaced by Brāhmanas in foreign missions to be more effective. The neo-Vaishnava movement of Sankaradeva (1449–1568) became widespread in the state. The royal family was initiated to the Sakti cult in 1714 and the aristocracy also adhered to the cult. However, the neo-Vaishnava

monasteries (*satra*) were increasingly patronized with large royal grants of rent-free lands and serfs (*paik*). In the meantime, the state was expanded by subduing the frontier chiefs and wresting the chieftaincies in lower Assam from the Mughals.¹⁵

Unlike the Āhoms who came from South-East Asia, the Dimāsā, Jaintiā, Tripuri, and Meitei states emerged from the indigenous social bases. A section of the Tibeto-Burman Bodos of the Brahmaputra valley, the Dimāsās (also known as Kāchāris) experienced the rudiments of state formation in Sadiyā (upper Assam). In the thirteenth century they had a fairly extensive and prosperous territory in the Dhansiri valley with Dimāpur as the seat of authority. When Dimāpur was sacked by the Āhoms in the fifteenth century, the survivors of the ruling clan moved to Maibong in the North Cachar hills along with their followers. Maibong became the new capital. It was in Maibong in the sixteenth century that the apparatus of the state was overhauled and a portion (the Barkholā-Bikrampur area) of old Srihatta in the Barak valley was annexed to their kingdom. This segment was very fertile and populated mainly by Bengali peasants. The first king of Maibong assumed the name Nirbhoya Nārāyana and all his successors took names ending with Nārāyana. The royal priest (*dharmādi*) became chief adviser to the king and this office became very important in the state structure. The king belonged to the Hāchengsa clan (which came to be recognized as the royal clan). The Brāhmanas found that the ruling tribe had descended from Hidimba of the *Mahābhārata* and, accordingly, they named the state as Heḍambarājya and the kings were called Heḍambeswara. This name was used in inscriptions, coins, and other documents. The Dimāsās now came to be known as Barman and were accepted as Kshatriya by caste. They were allowed the sacred thread. The Dimāsā deity, Kasāikhāti, came to be known as *Ranachandi* (Kālī) and a Ranachandi temple was built in the capital. The royal army was named *Chandi paltan*. The kings gave land to the temples and priests. The Bengali language was adopted for official correspondence, and the coins and inscriptions were in Sanskrit in the Assamese/Bengali script. The royal court was adorned by a galaxy of Brāhmana scholars who translated some of the epics and the *Puranas* into Bengali. The ministers, high officials, and nobles came from the next important clans. The ministers were appointed both from the Dimāsās and the Bengalis, and the local administrators were appointed from the respective communities. When the Bengali Muslim population increased in the plains, the office of the qazi was also created. The conflicts with the Āhoms, Jaintias, Koches, and the Mughals created conditions for administrative reforms and refinement of the political system. The capital was shifted from Maibong to Khāspur in the Barak valley in the eighteenth century when the Khāspur state, a satellite of Koch Bihar, merged into the Dimasa state as the result of a matrimonial relation between the two states.¹⁶

Another Tibeto-Burman group, the Tripuris were first noticed in the Kapili area of the Brahmaputra valley. The rudiments of state formation started in the Tripuri society when they were in the Barak valley and, according to the *Rājmālā* (the royal chronicle of Tripura), Khalangma (in Cachar) was their first capital. By the time they shifted the capital to Sylhet, their king assumed the name Mahā Mānikya. His son and successor, Dharma Mānikya, performed a yajna by inviting Brāhmana priests from Mithila. The Tripuris began to use the surname Debbarman and the members of the royal clan and aristocracy came to be known as Thakur. The royal chronicle traced the ancestry of the king to the lunar dynasty and regarded the ruling clans as Kshatriya. They ruled in parts of the Sylhet-Cachar region till about the thirteenth century and then moved to modern Tripura with their capital first at Kailāsahar, then at Udaypur, and finally at Agartalā. The hill tribes in Tripura were gradually subdued and those areas were brought within the state. Although ultimately they lost the Sylhet area to the Mughals and the Cachar plains to the Koches

(where the latter founded the Khāspur state), the Tripuri state included both hills and plains. It was only in 1761 that the East India Company and the nawāb of Bengal forced the king to enlist the Chaklā–Roshnābād area of the state as a zamindari of the king under the nawāb of Bengal. The plains segment was populated mainly by Bengali peasants. The inscriptions and coins were in Sanskrit in Bengali characters, and the official documents and chronicles were in Bengali. The rulers fought several battles with the sultans of Bengal and, at times, paid tribute. Ratna Mānikya was formally acknowledged as the mahārājā of Tripura by the badshah of Gaur (Bengal) in the fifteenth century. He brought a large number of Brāhmanas, Vaidyas, and Kāyasthas from Bengal and settled them in Tripura.¹⁷

State formation in the Jaintia hills, which was peopled by the Pnārs or Syntengs (a kindred group of the Khasis of Monkhmer race), started in early times with the emergence of *chnong* (villages) consisting of groups of families belonging to different clans (*kur/ jāid*). The adult males in each village elected a headman, called *u wāheh chnong* and a priest called *u lāngdoh chnong*, while the highest authority in the village was vested in the village council called *kā durbār chnong*. A group of villages formed a *rāid*, and a *rāid* council was called *kā durbār rāid*. At the next stage, a group of *rāids* formed a higher union called *elaka* under a *dāloi* (chief) who was assisted by a deputy called *u pātor* and guided by the elders called *ki wāsān*. The Jowai *elākā*, for example, included the *rāids* of Chyrmang, Jowai, Tuber, and Yalong. There were twelve such *rāids* or *dāloiships* in the Jaintia hills, which is popularly referred to as the land of *Khad-ar Daloi* (or twelve *dālois*) before the British annexation in 1835. In course of time, all the twelve *elākās* decided to form a union under a single chieftain when the *dāloi* of Sutnga was chosen as the *syiem* (or king). The twelve *elākās* thus voluntarily formed a *himā* or state. Although the Jaintiā society was matrilineal, an elitist strata that managed the society had emerged from adult males only. The existence of larger states in the neighbouring plains possibly influenced the process. The Jaintiās had trade contacts with the people of Sylhet from time immemorial. In fact, the Pnārs or Syntengs got their name (Jaintia) from Jayantiāpur (in the Sylhet plains), which was the seat of an earlier kingdom called Jayantiā. Its succeeding rulers like Kedareswar Roy, Dhaneswar Roy, Kandarpa Roy, and Jayanta Roy were Brāhmanas. Although the state had declined long before the formation of the Jaintia state, its traditions were current when the *syiem* of Sutnga occupied Jayantiāpur in the fifteenth century. The process of state formation entered a crucial phase with the shifting of the capital to Jaintiāpur (Jayantiāpur). Myths were created not only to give the family a divine descent, but also to connect the ancestry of the *rājā* with Jayanta Roy of the old Jayantiā kingdom. The *rājās* of Jaintiā, since Bar Gossain (who shifted the capital to Jaintiāpur), belonged to the Sākta sect with the exception of the last *rājā*, Rājendra Singha, who was initiated to the Vaishnava cult. The ancient temple of Jayanteswari (Kālī) in Jaintiāpur was maintained by the kings and new temples were built in different places. The *rāj pandit* (a Bengali Brāhman) occupied a special place in the official hierarchy. The *rājā* issued inscriptions and coins in Sanskrit in Bengali characters, and used Bengali in official documents and correspondence. They also made *devattara* and *dhanmattara* grants to temples and priests. The state extended up to the river Surma, which formed the boundary with Bengal. The ministers were appointed from both hills and plains, and the chiefs of the hills were all members of the royal council (*durbār*), whom the mahārājā consulted on all important matters. The high officials, particularly in the army, were recruited from Bengal, to strengthen the administration. The chieftaincies in the frontier with the Āhom state in the north (Brahmaputra valley), like Khola, Neli, and Dimaruā, were gradually subdued and made tributaries. Conflicts

with the neighbouring states of the Āhoms, Dimāsās, Tripuris, and the Mughals created conditions for a sophisticated apparatus of administration and defence from time to time, and strengthened the state.¹⁸

The Meitei state in Manipur emerged over a long period of time. The society consisted of seven clans: Ningthoujā, Āngom, Luwāng, Khumān, Khā-Ngānbā, Chenglei, and Moirāng. In addition, there were Bishnupriyā, Brāhman, and Pāgān communities who, though outsiders, were gradually accommodated in the Meitei society. At the initial stage the chieftaincy emerged in the villages which were uni-clan in nature. The dominant position of the *pibā* (head of a major lineage), *pibāren* (head of maximal lineage), and *ningthou* (clan head) was recognized by the people. The kingship came into existence when the Ningthoujā clan established its supremacy over other Meitei clans in the twelfth century. The state attained its final form in the eighteenth century when the last Meitei chieftaincy (Moirang) merged with the Meitei state headed by Ningthouja king. Thus, the uni-clan villages merged into chieftaincies, and from the clan chieftaincies emerged the kingship and the state. The king was initially called *lāiningthou*, but the title was changed to mahārājā in 1724–25 during the reign of Garib Nawāz (1709–48). In the meantime, Vaishnavism had made a deep impact in the Meitei society. The Rāmānandis were the first to penetrate Manipur. The Meiteis became Vaishnavas when Santidas Goswami of Sri Chaitanya's school came to Manipur from Nabadwip and Mahārājā Garib Nawāz made Vaishnavism the state religion. The earlier inscriptions and chronicles of the state were in Meitei language and scripts, but the mahārājā replaced the Meitei script by Bengali. Sanskrit and Bengali languages were also used liberally. The Bishnupur kingdom, founded by the Bishnupriyas, which preceded the Meitei state, created traditions that influenced the later state formations. An inscription of the Meitei king Khongtekchā (763–84) declared Hari as the 'Supreme God' and emphasized the worship of Siva and Durgā. King Kyaambā (1467–1508) built a Visnu temple in Bishenpur. The Brāhmanas immigrated in the fifteenth century. However, Charāi Rongbā (1698–1709) was the first Meitei king to be formally initiated to Vaishnavism. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Meitei kings fought and subdued many tribal chiefs within Manipur, while Garib Nawaz in the eighteenth century established his dominance over the hill tribes. He and his successors defeated the Māyāngs (the people of Cachar and Tripura) who invaded from the Cachar side. They also fought several battles with the Burmese. The prisoners of war from the Cachar side were gradually integrated into Meitei society. These prisoners were possibly the ancestors of the Manipuri Muslims. The kings built a strong army that was further reinforced during these wars.¹⁹

The Koch Bihar state was founded by one Hariā Mandal of Chikangrām village in the Goalpara area of lower Assam in the fifteenth century after the decline of the Kāmatāpur state. He was first recognized as the head of the twelve leading families or Bhuyāns of the area. He had two sons, named Bisu and Sisu, who were brave and enterprising. They raised a small army and gradually subdued the Bhuyāns or chiefs of the locality belonging to Koch, Mech, Rābhā, and Dhimāl tribes, and extended their sway to the Karatoya in the west and the Barnadi in the east. The Brāhmanas now declared that Bisu and Sisu were of a divine origin and that the Koch group of tribes was Kshatriya and Rājansī. Bisu was given the name Biswa Singha and Sisu became Siva Singha. After the death of Hariā, Biswa Singha became the king and appointed twelve ministers from the twelve leading families of the Rājansīs. Siva Singha was declared to be the *juvarāj*. Biswa Singha shifted the capital to Koch Bihar where he built a city. He worshipped Siva and Durga, gave gifts to the worshippers of Visnu, granted lands to temples, priests, and astrologers, imported Brāhmanas

from Kanauj, Varanasi and other centres of learning, and rebuilt the temple of Kāmākshya near Guwahati. He made a friendly visit to the Āhom king Suhungmung in 1737 and exchanged presents with him. Biswa Singha had several wives and eighteen sons. After his death, the third son, Nara Nārāyan, became king and the second son, Sukladhwaj (Chila Roy), his general. The brothers opposed to Nara Nārāyan were extinguished, while the loyal ones were rewarded by appointments as governors of the newly acquired provinces. Nara Nārāyan (1540–84) was the greatest of the Koch kings who subdued the Āhom, Jaintiā, Dimāsā, Meitei, and Tripuri rulers, and made them tributaries. He had conflicts with the Mughals and suffered a setback when Sukladhwaj died during a campaign against the Mughals in Bengal. This was the beginning of the decline of the state. The rulers of the Āhom, Jaintiā, Dimāsā, Meitei, and Tripuri states gradually reasserted themselves. The governors of Khāspur and Darrang, and several minor chiefs also, declared independence. Koch Bihār and Darrang were invaded by the Mughals several times and ultimately made tributary in the seventeenth century.²⁰

IV

The emergence of the Āhom, Dimāsā, Jaintiā, Tripuri, Meitei, and Koch states was the result of the endeavour of the tribal chiefs towards consolidation of political authority over tribes and clans. The Āhom and the Koch states emerged in the Brahmaputra valley over the ruins of earlier states, while the Jaintiā and the Meitei states came into existence when the more powerful clans established supremacy over others within the specific geographical areas. The Dimāsās and the Tripuris were pushed by others till they established their own kingdoms in the acquired territories by the same process of ultimate domination of one clan over the rest. The Āhoms came to the Brahmaputra valley as invaders, while the Koches passed through the domination of others before they established their own principality. The conflicts between the emerging states and repeated external aggression by the Turks, Afghans and Mughals augmented the process when the weaker tribes and clans submitted to the authority of the more powerful for protection. The genealogical linkages and relative hierarchical order were maintained even after the emergence of the states. The other chieftains within the principalities were allowed some amount of autonomy by way of accommodation and adjustment. Such chieftaincies were sometimes created and protected, particularly in the frontier areas, to serve as a buffer against external powers. New ethnic and social identities emerged in the process. The rulers established control over the resources, while economic disparity and social stratification became the order. The Brahmanical influence played a major role in legitimizing authority by establishing divine descent of the rulers. The royal priests enjoyed important positions in every state. The kings took pride in granting lands to Brāhmanas and temples. They encouraged the immigration of people of higher castes as well as peasants and artisans from the rest of India. The Jaintia, Dimasa, and Tripuri states included both hills and plains. These states had tribal as well as non-tribal subjects, who lived in demarcated areas, and the local administration of each ethnic division respected the traditions and customs of the communities. In Āhom and Koch states the tribal and non-tribal communities had closer interaction as they lived in the plains. In Manipur the Meiteis lived in the valley. The kings exercised nominal control over the tribal chiefs who lived in the hills. Nevertheless, the concept of the state as a common identity substantially influenced the social and economic life of the people in all states and contributed to the growth of larger identities.

The processes of state formation in the region in the medieval period suggest some common elements in all cases. The tribal formations experienced transformation with the emergence of private property, when inequality emerged in the tribal societies in terms of differentiated landholding and the extent of political dominance. This strengthened the position of the traditional leaders or chiefs in relation to others. The sphere of political dominance of a chief was extended either by subduing the neighbouring chiefs/tribes/clans/communities or by direct territorial conquests or by voluntary submission to his protective authority. His authority was further strengthened when he led the people in war either for other offensive or defensive purposes. The ruling chiefs succeeded in developing a centralized administration with an elaborate defence apparatus and the means of appropriating surplus through an hierarchical social order. The introduction of more developed agricultural technology sometimes ensured increased production as well as production control on the part of the ruler as an essential pre-condition for a centralized political authority. The families with a tradition of administrative proficiency, and artisans and peasants were induced to immigrate from the neighbouring areas and to settle in the territory. The role of the Brāhmanas in establishing the divine origin of the ruler helped the legitimization of the assumed status of the latter and its consolidation, and the myths that were created in the process resulted in the universalization of the culture. The adoption of the language and culture of the majority in the territory's population by the ruling family and aristocracy enlisted loyalty and support of that dominant revenue-paying group. The rulers emerged as the champions of their new faith and patrons of the culture and language of their subjects. The matrimonial relations maintained with the royal families in other states with similar ethnic and cultural traditions generated mutual support and raised their status in the eyes of the subjects. Diplomatic relations with more powerful neighbours were found to be essential either to ensure non-aggression by such neighbours or to pacify the disgruntled elements within the state. The factors that inspired development into statehood in most cases were: population growth and population pressure; war, the threat of war, or raids; conquest; the income from production and the promotion of surplus, and tributes; ideology and legitimacy; and the influence of already existing states.²¹

The states had well-defined territories and the rulers zealously guarded the concept of sovereignty. The kings were mahārājās, and in the Āhom case he was both mahārājā (great king) and 'Swargadeva' (Lord of Heaven), and this concept was emphasized in coins, inscriptions, correspondence, and chronicles of the states. They had divine origins, and they professed their devotion to the Brahmanical deities in coins and inscriptions. The kingship was hereditary, reserved for celestial clans, and the aristocracy belonged to the special clans, which were higher than the commoners. The kings built palaces and lived in a style opposed to the concept of egalitarian tribal societies. The ministers and high officials came from the clans next to the royal clan. These genealogical or clan linkages were never allowed to be disturbed. However, the royal priests enjoyed a special status and even the kings were bound to offer obeisance to them in public. The roles of the monarchy, aristocracy, and commonality were reflected in privileges and duties as well as in social status. The Āhom administrative structure with its civil, revenue, and military departments was elaborate. The *khel* and the *pāik* systems ensured the regular supply of manorial services, and the grassroots organizations like *bar mel* and *rāj mel* provided channels of royal control over the masses. The administration was not so elaborate in other states, but the apparatus was sufficient for sustenance and surveillance in all cases.²²

The states existed by extracting surplus in the form of tribute and labour. The economic potential of the states guaranteed the control of the kings over the resources. The

land conceptually belonged to either the king or the clan. The mainstay of the economy was agriculture. There were also various crafts based on local raw materials. However, these could not grow beyond the level of cottage industries due to general technological backwardness. Forest products, limestone, and iron-ore were supplied to the neighbouring regions in raw forms. In the plains the rulers systematically encouraged wet rice cultivation. In the hills shifting cultivation continued to be the dominant mode of cultivation. The forests and minerals belonged to the kings. Members of the royal family and aristocracy were assigned personal estates in many cases. The kings exercised control over external trade—export and import—for which checkpoints were laid in the frontiers for collection of taxes. The land was the most important source of revenue, which was generally collected in kind. The hill people paid no land tax. However, they were required to pay tribute to the chiefs and rulers on festive occasions. The kings also collected tribute from the subordinate rulers and chieftains. They encouraged the immigration of peasants and artisans from outside and settled them in the plains to maximize revenue. The plain areas were economically important and, therefore, the capitals of all states were located in the plains.²³

The economic policies of the rulers and their bearing on the people can be gleaned from the situation in the Āhom state.²⁴ As it came into existence, it took up the role of extracting surplus labour for purposes of reallocation within the ruling class. The militia could be easily transformed into an oppressive organ because of the customarily entrenched representation of high-status lineage groups in its leadership. The state increasingly admitted non-Āhoms into the position of spiritual guides and preceptors, the middle strata of the bureaucratic hierarchy. The demographic influx, increased division of labour, influences of neighbouring states, 'Hinduization', and, above all, the need for allies to resolve the conflicting relations and to establish social equation for that purpose between the rulers and the ruled further modified the character of the state.

The states were formed by subduing clans, and other tribes and communities, and they existed by commanding the loyalty of the subjects. The concept that the king was of divine origin by and large impressed the people. He gifted lands to deities and priests, and championed the cause of the new-found religion. Temples were built in all the states to be visited by the people for spiritual purposes. The rulers were the protectors of the subjects. They constructed roads, dug canals and ponds, and regulated markets and external trade, which benefited the people. They also provided relief during floods and famines.²⁵ However, the states could not hold themselves for good due to internal contradictions. The genealogical linkage was a weakness that did not allow sophistication beyond some degrees. The ruling class could not resolve the growing contradictions within itself and between the classes and tribes and communities. Palace intrigues were endemic in all the states. Peasant and tribal revolts were reported from various states in the eighteenth century. The Moāmāria rebellion in Āhom state and the revolt of the hill tribes in Dimāsā state assumed alarming proportions. The military strength also could not survive the test of time. The Āhoms resisted the Mughals, but Koch Bihār, Cachar (Dimāsā), and Tripura succumbed to accept tributary status at different points of time. The conflicts between the neighbouring states exhausted them. By the end of the eighteenth century all states were on the decline. The British accomplished colonization in the nineteenth century without much resistance from the states, although the hill tribes who were outside the states resisted for a long time.²⁶

V

The states in North-East India included their own hill segments, but the larger portion of the hill areas in the region was outside the states where different tribes maintained their own traditions and political systems. The mountainous character of the territory, linguistic variations, inter-clan feuds, and inter-tribal warfare prevented larger polity formations among the hill tribes, while the superstitious customs of headhunting and sorcery practised by some of the tribes engendered a policy of indifference on the part of the rulers in the neighbouring plains.

The hills were clothed with dense forests and bordered by hollows and swamps. Innumerable streams cut deep gorges as they descended to the plains. The physiographic conditions rendered communication almost impossible. The geography had thus imposed a formidable barrier on the integration of the tribes, their association with the plains or the evolution of larger political organizations. Therefore, the clan societies in the hills managed their affairs through self-governing institutions. The form of governance was either democracy or aristocracy or limited monarchy. The chief (*nokma*) of a Garo clan (*māchong*) was a resident son-in-law, as the Garo society was matrilineal. The traditions suggest that the post was initially elective, but in course of time it became identified with the oldest family in the *māchong*. Therefore, the son-in-law succeeded the father-in-law. However, the disputes within the clan as well as the matters of war and peace with other clans were decided in an assembly (*jigmā-chānggā*) of the residents. The Khasi system was an aristocracy. The syiem (ruler) of a principality (*himā*) belonged to a specific clan and the nephew succeeded the maternal uncle under matrilineal principles. However, the succession had to be confirmed by an assembly (*durbār*) of adult males. The notables (*rongbāh*) played a very important role in social and political matters. The *himā* was almost a state, and there is no doubt that the rudiments of state formation had already started in the Khasi hills. On the eve of British civilization the most powerful of the Khasi states was Khyriem whose ruler had under his control about seventy villages and 3000 armed followers. The ruler of Myllem, who had under him thirty villages, was subordinate to the ruler of Khyriem. The chiefs of Sohra, Nongkhlaw, Nongspung, Mawroh, and Mahram were also powerful rulers. Most of the Naga chiefs were leaders of public opinion and their polity was democratic in a limited sense. However, some of the Naga tribes, particularly the eastern Nagas, had hereditary chiefs who wielded considerable power in their respective clans. The Changnoi chief, for example, exercised hegemony over the Nagas between the rivers Dikhow and Buridihing. Nevertheless, each Naga clan was actually ruled by its council (*morung*) where all the important decisions concerning the welfare of the clan were taken. The Kukis and Lushais (Mizo) had hereditary chiefs and their authority in some cases was absolute. The Angami Naga chiefs were also powerful, like some of the tribes in the Arunachal hills. The political systems in Bhutan had significantly influenced the neighbouring tribes in Arunachal as some of these tribes were also Buddhists. Bhutan was a monarchy with the *deva rājā* as its head, although the spiritual authority was vested in another chief, called *dharma rājā*, as Buddhism was the dominant religion in the territory. The *deva* was chosen from the genre of the realm to hold office for a term of three years. A council of six aided him in his duties. The eastern and western divisions of the territory were managed by two governors, *tongso* and *pilo*, who could sit in councils and who were consulted on all questions of importance. The *pilo* had under him six officers of rank, called *zoompoom*. Another set of officials, called *zinkoff*, served as the channel of communication between *pilo* and the neighbouring chiefs. The Nishi tribes maintained an oligarchic system in which the

authority of a few in each clan was acknowledged by the rest. The Akas, Khamptis, and Singphos were ruled by hereditary chiefs who had almost unlimited authority over their respective clans. The Mishmis also had their hereditary chiefs, but the authority of the latter was not absolute. The Adis had *gaums* (chiefs) appointed by the respective clans. They acknowledged no other authority but that of the people who assembled in councils (*morung*) where all the important decisions concerning the welfare of the clan were taken. The chief of Tawang was called a *rājā* and he was as powerful as a king, although he was himself a vassal of the authority at Lhasa. The Kanpo and Monpa chiefs, known as *sath rājās*, were feudatories of the Tawang *rājā* who also exercised nominal control over the chiefs of Rupraegaon and Shergaon. In fact, more than 200 major tribes (besides innumerable others) in north-east India were subdivided into numerous clans or sub-tribes headed by their own chiefs. In some cases, the powerful chiefs had subdued weak neighbours, but the chiefs were innumerable till the coming of the British in the nineteenth century. In the Garo hills there were more than 200 *nokmās*. The Khasis had thirty *syiems* (besides some *sardārs*), and almost similar was the number of the powerful Lushai chiefs (*lāl*). All other tribes in the Mizo hills had their own chiefs and institutions. In the Naga hills, Karbi hills, and Arunachal the chiefs were uncountable. The Jaintiā, Dimāsā, Tripuri, and Meitei states included hill areas, but the kings exercised very limited control over the hill tribes. The local administration was entrusted to the traditional chiefs who acknowledged the authority of the king and paid nominal tributes. In Jaintia hills there were twelve *dālois* and some *sardārs* who managed the local administration through respective *durbār* (assembly). In the context of the hills, the *rājā* of Jayantia was merely the head of a confederacy, as he could not carry out many measures of importance without the concurrence of the chiefs. The *dāloi* of Nartiang was the most influential among these chiefs and his consent was essential in all important matters. In the North Cachar hills there were forty clans (*sāmpong*) and the authority of the *rājā* extended over the tribes through the chiefs of these clans. Although state formation in the plains covered the tribes to which the rulers originally belonged, the kings had gradually alienated themselves from the kinsmen and the basic aspects of the tribal polity in the hills remained unaffected till the advent of the British in the hills.²⁷

The tribes generally lived in feud with one another, sometimes continuing for several generations. It was incumbent on the injured to avenge the offending clan. The Singphos believed that the soul of the murdered will torment the descendants until his urges were appeased by the death of the enemies and that the anger of the deity would be roused should an opportunity of retaliation be neglected. The relations of a Garo who was killed were bound by custom to demand blood for blood, and to put to death either the murderer or one of his kindred. This spirit of revenge was common amongst almost all the tribes, which made them live with hostilities. Most of the tribes avoided pitched battles and resorted to surprises and ambushes. The Khamtis and Singphos advanced at nights to the enemy's positions and killed everyone indiscriminately. The Nagas also attacked the enemy villages in the dead of night, setting fire to the dwellings and massacring all the inhabitants. The Miris and the Adis carried on nocturnal surprise attacks. The weapons of the Khamtis and Singphos consisted mainly of swords and long crossbows and arrows. They used a headdress of buffalo hide and shield. The eastern Nagas used common bows and arrows, swords, and shields made of buffalo and bear skin. The Angamis had their battleaxes and spears, besides shields of buffalo hide or bamboo. The Khasis and Jaintias armed themselves with bows and arrows, long naked swords, and shields. The arms of the Adis and the Mishmis consisted of long straight swords, long spears, bows, and arrows. The

Nishis had long swords, daggers, bows, and arrows. The Bhutias and Garos armed themselves with matchlocks, axes, and swords, besides bows and arrows. The Akas used light spears and swords, and bows and arrows. Some of the tribes poisoned the arrows and spears, while many of them decorated the headdress and shields or spears with colours, feathers, and bamboo or woodwork to give the appearance of seasoned warriors. The villages were carefully planned to make them defensive and inaccessible to enemies. The Bhutias built forts of stones with thick walls and put spikes of bamboo around them. The Akas, Singphos, and the Nagas were skilled in erecting strong stockades and occasionally fixed muskets to fire at the advancing enemy. The Khasis, Garos, Nagas, Mizos, and almost all the tribes gave priority to inaccessibility in selecting sites for villages, barricaded them with trees, and planted bamboo spikes on possible approaches. They also maintained stocks of stone boulders to throw as missiles on the advancing enemy. The bachelors in the dormitories served as watch and ward, and they were trained in warfare. They would beat drums and gongs to alarm the residents in an emergency.²⁸

VI

Tribal society in the hills was clan oriented, and kinship dominated the social structure as most of the tribes were generally endogamous. However, the features of a stratified society were clearly visible in almost all the tribal groups. A notable few emerged in the clans as eminent and the rest of the kinsmen accepted their dominant position. Tribal society was broadly divided into classes—freemen and slaves. The slaves included captives from other tribes and the neighbouring plains. The condition of the slaves differed from tribe to tribe. The Padams were known for the humane treatment of slaves. The Singphos treated slaves as members of the family. They worked together, ate together, and slept together. Polygamy was common amongst the Mishings, Mishmis, Nishis, and Nagas, while polyandry prevailed among the Bhutias and some of the northern tribes of Tibetan extraction. The Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo societies were matrilineal and these tribes were generally monogamous. However, the management of social and political institutions was the privilege of the men. Nevertheless, women were respected in all tribal societies. Mizo society was male dominated and women also had to work hard. The Adis held women in high esteem and the hard work was considered to be the duty of the man. On the other hand, Singpho women not only did the entire household duties of cooking, cleaning the grain from the husk, spinning, weaving, and dying, but also the laborious outdoor work of drawing water, planting, reaping the crops, and cutting and bringing firewood. The raising of the crops was the work of the menfolk, while the women in almost all the tribes assisted the men in the fields, besides doing household work and weaving.²⁹

In the valleys of the Brahmaputra and the Barak, there were castes and sub-castes among the Hindus, although the caste system was not very rigid. The tribal communities in the plains were in the process of being assimilated into the Hindu fold. Although they worshipped some of the Hindu gods and goddesses, they paid homage to their traditional deities, and practised tribal rituals and customs. In the early medieval period there were fresh waves of migration of Brāhmanas from Gaur (Bengal), Kanauj, and Mithila. Inscriptions and literary sources mention the functions of various castes. The Brāhmanas performed six-fold duties. The *tols* and *chhātrasālās* were manned by Brāhmana scholars. In the Brahmaputra valley the *daivajna* or *ganak*, who were Brāhmanas of lower status, were astrologers and performed all *sanskāras*. The Kāyasthas were engaged in maintaining

accounts and served as scribes. However, some of the Kāyasthas carved out principalities for themselves under the Kāmatā kings and they came to be known as Bhuyān. The noted religious leaders, social reformers, and scholars like Sankaradeva and Mādhavadeva were Kāyasthas. The Kalitās were numerous in the Brahmaputra valley. Besides being agriculturists, they practised various crafts and professions. They intermarried with the Kāyasthas and occupied a respectable position in Assamese society. The Keots occupied the position next to the Kalitās. They are believed to have originated from the Kaivartas and were boatmen, fishermen, etc., by profession. The Brahmana, Kāyastha, Kalitā, Keot, Saloi, Ganak, Kumār, Nāpit, Suri, Cāmār, Dhobā, Yugi, Hari, Candālā, etc., are mentioned in the inscriptions of medieval Assam. The Āhom, Koch, Dimāsā, Tripuri, and Meitei were Indo-Mongoloids who were rulers of medieval states, and although proclaimed as Kshatriya and allowed the sacred thread, they were considered separate castes. The Muslims constituted a small community. Besides following the law of the *Quran* and the shariat, they observed some of the local customs and social ceremonies.³⁰

VII

Animism was the dominant theme in the religious traditions of the hill tribes in the medieval period. They lived in the lands of lofty mountains, roaring rivers, deep valleys, and dense forests. Therefore, nature was the most important influencing factor in their day-to-day worldly life, their future, and life hereafter. In storms, thunder, earthquakes; in fact, in everything that happened, they saw the role of the spirit, and this spirit was the deity or the god of their perception. The Adis, Nishis, and Mishmis invoked the spirits who resided in the inaccessible mountains and dense forests. The Nagas acknowledged a divine power to be the creator of the universe and the dispenser of all events. The Nishis, Mishmis, and Mishings had the notion of a 'Supreme Being'. The Akas worshipped Fuxā (the jungle god), Feirām (the war god), and Silā (the household god), and made annual sacrifices of *mithun*, goats, and pigs to propitiate the spirit of water. The deity of the Garos was Saljong to whom they offered sacrifices of he-goats, pigs, and fowl. The Khasi religion was monotheistic. The concept of one Supreme Being was very clear to the Khasis, although there were several minor deities and various rituals to ensure better harvest and to dispel the agents of sickness and calamities. The number of deities was large for each tribe and they had several rituals to perform.

Superstitions were very strong. Famines, sickness, or misfortunes of all sorts were supposed to occur due to the influence of some unknown and invisible agents. Sorcery was considered to be the method of protecting the people from these evils. The priests read omens by the breaking of eggs or on examination of the entrails of chickens. Among the Mishmis, Singphos, Garos, and many other tribes, each clan had its sorcerer who was called if something untoward happened in the village. The sorcerer appeared in queer garments and claimed to possess supernatural power. The Garos considered witchcraft as a necessary remedy for many evils. The Nagas, Mizos, Garos, and many others believed that the soul of the deceased would not rest in peace unless a human skull was burnt along with the dead body. Headhunting was an age-old practice among these tribes. It was a spiritual necessity as well as an act of chivalry. A Naga youth would not be distinguished as brave unless he had some heads to his credit either as trophies in war or by treacherous murders. The British had to deal with the problems of headhunting and sorcery in the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The impact of Hinduism was felt among the hill tribes like Akas, Mishings, Karbis, and Dimasas, while Buddhism had been deeply rooted among the Bhutias, Monpas, and Khamtis. The Buddhist tribes are mostly found in the north-east frontier hill tracts, now called Arunachal Pradesh. In upper Assam also, some Khamti and other Buddhist tribes were found. The Khamtis, Doaniahs, Tai-Phakes, Turungs, Aitaniyas, and Narahs were small Buddhist communities who migrated to upper Assam in the early part of the eighteenth century. These Buddhist communities were controlled in social and religious matters by the *bāpu-chāng* or the Buddhist chapel manned by the saffron-clad *sramanas*. They belonged to the Hinayāna school of Buddhism as practised in Burma. Tibetan Buddhism was dominant in the Tawang area of Arunachal Pradesh. The Buddhist monastery at Tawang is an ancient institution.³¹

Inscriptions, coins, and chronicles suggest that Saivism and Saktism flourished in the region, particularly in the plains areas. Ancient shrines and temples were renovated and maintained, and new ones were built by the rulers. The epics and *Puranas* were translated into local languages in Assam, Cachar, Tripura, Jaintia, and Manipur, for which the kings extended patronage to scholars. They also gifted lands for the maintenance of temples and Brāhmanas. Srimanta Sankaradeva introduced neo-Vaishnavism in Assam and Koch Bihār. In the Barak valley Gaudiya Vaishnavism of Sri Chaitanya Mahāprabhu made a considerable impact, as the family of Chaitanya originally belonged to the village Dakadakshin in Sylhet. The Gaudiya Vaishnavism was introduced in Manipur by Santidas Goswami of Navadwipa and it took a deep root in Manipuri society. The Dimasa kings of Cachar were converted to Vaishnavism in the eighteenth century. Saktism continued to be the dominant cult in Jaintia and Tripura. In Assam neo-Vaishnavism of Sankaradeva attracted the masses, although the Āhom kings and the aristocracy adhered to Saktism. Saiva sites flourished in all states as ancient shrines. The people in general worshipped Siva, Sakti, and Visnu without any discrimination.

The advent of Islam and Sikhism and a new wave of Buddhism strengthened the tradition of religious toleration and peaceful coexistence. Some Buddhist tribes migrated to Assam from Burma. They practised Hinayāna Buddhism. However, Buddhism in this period degenerated into tantricism or Vajrayānā. The magical and occult practices of some Buddhist groups are recorded in Assamese chronicles. According to some sources Guru Nānak visited the Kāmākshya temple in 1505 and halted at Dhubri for some time. There has been a small Sikh community in Assam since then. Guru Tegh Bahadur came to Dhubri in 1666 when Raja Ram Singh led a Mughal expedition against the Āhom king under the orders of Aurangzeb. The Sikh soldiers raised a mound of earth at Damdama, as asked by the guru for offering prayers, which later on became the site of a gurdwāra. Some Muslim soldiers, who accompanied expeditions since the thirteenth century, settled in Assam. Tugril Khan, who led an expedition in 1256, built the first mosque in Assam. The saintly son of Abu Bakr, who led another expedition in 1614, died in Hājo and his tomb is known as Powā Makkā. Mir Jumlah built a mosque in Mankachar. Five Muslim saints accompanied the expedition of Ram Singh. These five saints were left behind and they breathed their last in Assam. In Dhubri there is a dargāh of five pirs who were Sufi saints. Badarpur in the Barak valley is believed to have got its name from Shah Badar, a Sufi saint whose visit to the region has been recorded by Ibn Battuta. The dargāh of Hazrat Shah Jālāl in Sylhet stands as a monument of the great Muslim saint and his 360 followers (*āuliās*) who preached the Sufi cult in the region. The most important role in the spread of Islam in Assam, however, was played by Shah Milān, popularly known as Ājān Fakir, who composed devotional songs, called *zikir* and *jāri* in Assamese, which had a lot of similarities with the devotional songs of

the Vaishnavas. Sufism made a considerable impact on the society. The Āhom kings were impressed by the spiritual attainments of the pirs and the fakirs, and they gifted lands for mokāms and dargāhs. These were visited by Hindus and Muslims alike as holy shrines.³²

VIII

Agriculture was the mainstay of economy in North-East India in the medieval period. In the hill areas the tribals resorted to *jhum* or shifting cultivation. They were also craftsmen at leisure. Handloom and handicraft had local varieties, while weaving was almost a household activity for all communities. Agricultural yield was generally poor due to the poverty of the soil and primitive method of cultivation in most cases. *Jhum* was not very productive, while technological backwardness made the tribes exchange hill products with the people in the neighbouring plains for foodstuff and other necessities for which there was a string of markets in the foothills since time immemorial. The economy of the hills, therefore, was largely dependent on the neighbouring plains. The Bhutias cultivated barley and wheat in the highlands and river valleys, and mustard, pulses, maize, sugarcane, and fruits of various kinds in the lower ranges. They had to depend on the lowlands of Assam and Bengal for grains and other foodstuff. The Adis, Nishis, and the Akas raised rice and wheat, besides red pepper, ginger, and vegetables. The agricultural economy of the Khamtis, the Singphos, and some other tribes of Arunachal depended mainly on the labour of their slaves who were mostly captives from Assam. The Apatanis, however, excelled in wet rice cultivation. The Nagas in general raised rice, tobacco, chilli, and vegetables. Cotton cultivation flourished in Naga hills, particularly in the valley of Dhansiri occupied by the Lhota and the Rengma Nagas. Cotton grew abundantly in Garo hills, which attracted the attention of the East India Company in the eighteenth century as an additional source of supply to Manchester. The Khasi and Jaintia hills supplied limestone and iron-ore to Bengal. Some European merchants made a fortune in lime trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Jaintias, Dimasas, and the Karbis practised *jhum* in highlands and wet cultivation in the lowlands and river valleys. The Mizos did extensive *jhum* cultivation, but they depended to a large extent on the Cachar plains for supply of grains. Most of the tribes relied on the plains of Assam and Bengal for their requirements of cloth, utensils, and implements. Local manufacture was limited to spearheads, swords, hoes, and a few other articles of the kind. Commercial traffic was an integral component of the economy of the hill people despite the difficulty of intercommunication. The Mishmis were the intermediaries between the Assamese and the Chinese. The Kampos brought down to the Assam plains coloured blankets, baskets, gold dust, silver bars, rock salt, musk, and Chinese silk. The Nagas exchanged loads of cotton in Assam for daily necessities. The Garos, Khasis, Mizos, and all other tribes traded with the people of neighbouring plains in the foothills. Barter was the only mode of exchange.³³

In the plains agriculture was the principal occupation of the people. High or low, from the humble men to the members of the royalty and aristocracy, people were engaged in agriculture. Artisans and craftsmen also carried on agriculture as their main profession. Great attention was given to the cultivation of paddy, as rice was the staple food of the people. Alluvial deposits were available in the valleys of the Brahmaputra and the Barak, and the Tripura and Manipur plains, which were intersected by innumerable streams. Abundance of rainfall facilitated the cultivation of paddy. Wet or transplanted, as well as dry varieties of paddy were mainly cultivated. As the hill ranges bordered valleys and plains,

terrace cultivation was also practised in the foothills. In the hills or mounds that intersected or dotted the valleys and plains the people resorted to shifting cultivation. People in the plains generally raised three varieties of crops: *āhu* or *āus*, *bāo* or *buro*, and *sālī*, corresponding with the seasons and the nature of the soil. The plough was the main agricultural implement. It consisted of a crooked piece of a hard wood fitted with a small iron share for penetrating into the soil. As the soil was generally soft, the plough was light and simple. It was used only to loosen the soil and to uproot weeds. Bullocks and buffaloes were engaged for pulling the plough. Cowdung was the only manure used in some areas, as the low, marshy and intermittently flooded rice fields hardly required any manuring. Mustard seed, pulse, pepper, ginger, garlic, onion, turmeric, potato, sugarcane, tobacco, poppy, nut (areca and coconut), jute, indigo, lac, silk (*endi* and *mugā*), and several varieties of fruit and vegetables were grown in abundance.

Sericulture was well developed in Assam since the pre-medieval period. Weaving was a household activity in Assam and Manipur, and each family produced enough cloth for its members. There were two types of loom: the waist loom and the one fixed with posts on the ground. Woodcraft had also attained considerable excellence. Pottery had come down from ancient times, and brickwork made significant progress in the medieval period. Blacksmiths had acquired the skill of manufacturing implements of common use as well as war weapons. Goldsmiths thrived under the patronage of the royalty and aristocracy. Gold dust was collected from the sands of several local rivers. Silver was brought from Bengal by the Khasis and the Garos, and some quantity came from Tibet and China. Brass and copper utensils were locally produced. Braziers and bell-workers had attained some degree of proficiency. Brine springs were located in the foothills and although salt was an important industry, the quantity collected from the springs was inadequate to meet the requirement of the people who used alkaline made of dried plantain leaves as a substitute.³⁴

The region had a long history in trade, which balanced the deficit by disposal of the surplus produce. Internal trade was promoted through *hāats* and markets set up by the chiefs and rulers at convenient places. These were also used for collection of revenue. The common items brought to the local markets included betel leaf, areca nut, lime, black pepper, mustard seed, ginger, earthenware, ironware, and livestock like cattle, buffaloes, goats, ducks, etc. The transactions were made by barter of commodities or through the medium of cowries, and generally directly between the producers and the consumers. These markets were subject to market regulations and official supervision of the prices of articles and payment of tolls by traders. The *chokeys* and *duārs*, established by the rulers and chiefs at strategic positions in the frontiers for the collection of custom duties, also served as markets. To regulate Assam–Bengal trade, there were at least seven chokeys on the Brahmaputra in lower Assam. Of these, the Kandahar chokey was known as the emporium of Assam trade. This chokey was managed by a hereditary royal officer called *duāriā baruā* who was assisted by subordinate officers like *bairāgis* and *katakis*. Bijni, Chappakhamar, Chapaguri, and Buriguma were important *duārs* on the Assam–Bhutan frontier; Koriapara, Gegunseer, and Sadiya on the Arunachal side, and Jagi, Neli, Khola, Dimarua, Gobha, and Barduar on the borders of the Khasi–Jaintia hills. Assam had trade links with Tibet, China, and Burma either directly or through the intermediaries. European merchants were involved in north-eastern trade since the seventeenth century when Sylhet and Goalpara emerged as flourishing commercial centres in Bengal to cater to the demands of the frontier. The East India Company took an interest in Assam trade after the battle of Plassey and this led to the signing of a commercial treaty with the Ahom king on 28 February 1793.³⁵

The *kapardaks* and cowries were the standard medium of exchange in the beginning of the medieval period. The kapardak was related to silver and gold dusts of a fixed weight. In the Barak valley the silver coinage of Harikela was in circulation. However, the cowrie remained in use throughout the medieval period. The rulers of Āhom, Koch, Kachari (Dimāsā), Jaintiā, Manipuri, and Tripuri states issued gold, silver, and copper coins of various denominations with royal symbols and legends in Assamese/Bengali characters. Most of these coins were undoubtedly commemorative medals issued on important royal occasions, but it is not unlikely that some of these coins, at least those of smaller denominations, served as the medium of exchange. In Manipur the bell-metal coinage of small denominations was in circulation till the end of the eighteenth century. The gold *mohars* were mentioned in chronicles and documents of the various states, and many were preserved as heirlooms till recent times. The Nagas used an iron piece (*jubeli*) as a medium of exchange. Several commodities were used as units of money. Salt, opium, cattle, clothes, rice, etc., were found to be the medium of exchange towards the end of the eighteenth century. The balance of external trade was paid in gold. However, there was a gradual increase in the use of coins in commercial transactions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Shihabuddin Talish, who accompanied Mir Jumla in his invasion of Āhom territory, found that currency consisted of cowries, rupees, and gold coins. Tavernier noted that the gold coins of the Āhom state were allowed to be taken outside. The *nārāyani* coins of Koch Bihar were in circulation in the adjoining districts of Bengal. The economy of Jayantiā and Cachar was linked with the Sylhet area of Bengal, and commercial transactions were allowed in Bengal currency. The currency system or the standardized medium of exchange facilitated royal control on trade and economy, and social stability in the states.³⁶

IX

The states and societies in North-East India were at different stages of development during the medieval period. The tribal communities in the hill areas were mostly at the pastoral stage and the process of migrations from outside continued almost till the end of the eighteenth century. Jhum or shifting cultivation impelled people to move from place to place in search of alternative jhum fields. The technological backwardness was a common feature in the region. In the plains areas wet cultivation and settled village life was in existence since ancient times. The plough was also in use.

Brahmanical states rose and fell in the valleys of the Brahmaputra and the Barak. Some of these states covered parts of Bengal. In the medieval period states emerged from indigenous tribal bases under Brahmanical influences. Some of these states covered parts of plains and hills. The rulers patronized education and culture. Life became gradually stable under royal control. Remnants of medieval palaces, temples, and buildings are still scattered all over the region. State capitals, transit stations, and the markets were the only urban places, without much impact on the life of the common men. The finer aspects of life in literature, art, and music also flourished under royal patronage. Manipuri dance, which is so popular today, has a medieval origin and is connected with the advent of Vaishnavism in Manipur. The neo-Vaishnava movement of Sankaradeva in the Brahmaputra valley gave a fillip to literature, music, and performing arts. The Assamese *Ānkia Nāt* and *Bhāonā* date to that phase. However, the urbanization process was very slow. The region as a whole was essentially a rural enclave with internal differentiation of more and less forward and backward groups and strata. The economy on the whole was not monetized.

The stratification process was complete in the settled groups with wealth, and social status was the privilege of the few. Even in tribal societies creamy layers had begun to emerge.

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B.N. Mukherjee writes:

In the Kachari territory in the Barak Valley area silver coinage, connected with the Harikela currency system, had been in regular use for a long time in the protomedieval age. So at least parts of the

north-east had experience of using coinage in premedieval times. Hence when the coinage was first issued in the north-east, specifically in the Kachar area in the year 1442 of the Saka era, under the apparent influence of the coinage of Tripura and the Sultans of Bengal, regional commerce was expected to become gradually familiar with coin-money. Outside coins could have been used in case of positive or absence of local issues. This hypothesis receives support if there is any truth in the statement of the *Darranga Rājavamsāvali* that Naranarayana demanded from a Kachari ruler in about the third quarter of the 16th century an annual tribute consisting of *inter alia* 70,000 *rupā* and 1000 gold *muh*r coins from a king of Kāchār' (Quoted from Barpujari, *Comprehensive History of Assam* [vol. III], p. 164).

CHAPTER 20

Kumaon and Garhwal: State and Society

M.P. Joshi

I

In the eleventh century the Katyuris were ruling over Kumaon and Garhwal. The name Katyuri was derived from the valley of Katyur, which is believed to be the Karttikeyapura of local inscriptions.¹ During their palmy days from the eighth to the tenth century the Katyuris held sway over vast tracts of the Central Himalayas, extending from Garhwal in the west to Nepal in the east.² By the eleventh century, however, their power had begun to decline, probably due to the contending political ambitions of different Katyuri families, resulting in the disintegration of their kingdom.³

Our knowledge of the Katyuris rests on scanty inscriptional sources, which, being votive, are confined to the recording of names of kings. Even dates are missing in most cases. Thus, the Gananath inscription (district Almora) on a Vaikuntha image records its installation in 1002 by king Tribhuvanapala, son of Indrapala and grandson of Lakhanapala.⁴ This image originally belonged to the Lakshmi Narayan temple at Baijnath (Katyur valley, district Almora). It is likely that these kings represented the main line of the Katyuris, which continued ruling from the Katyur valley probably upto the early thirteenth century, for in his Balesvar copperplate inscription of Saka 1223 Krachalla Deva, the king of Dulu, claims to have uprooted the king of Kartipura.⁵ Many more Katyuri kings are known from several other Nagari inscriptions palaeographically datable from the eleventh to the fourteenth century. In the present state of our knowledge their chronological order cannot be determined precisely. Likewise, we are not in a position to fix their place in genealogical order of the central Katyuri dynasty. Available evidence suggests that princes belonging to the junior lines of the Katyuri dynasty who held gubernatorial positions in different provinces under the unitary state of the Karttikeyapura Katyuris declared independence severally in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Many of these petty Katyuri rulers, called Later Katyuris, have left inscriptions in their respective areas of influence, notably, Doti-Dandeldhura, Sira, Sor, Askot, Katyur, Pali, and Baramandal.

The Katyuri copperplates issued from Karttikeyapura in the Siddhamatrika characters of the ninth and tenth centuries show that they had a well-organized army that included

elephant force, camelry, and cavalry, in addition to archers and swordsmen.² The list of officers in the Katyuri copperplates is far more exhaustive than those of their predecessors, the Paurava Varmans, and it shares many things with the administrative machinery of the Palas of Bengal.³ Whether or not the Katyuris continued to maintain their military and administrative set-up during the medieval period, these features are significant in terms of socio-political formations.

The people of the Central Himalayas during the Katyuri period must have produced enough social surplus, enabling the Katyuris to maintain an elaborate administrative and military set-up. Moreover, the religious, artistic and architectural activities noticed throughout the Katyuri period could not have been possible without sufficient social surplus.⁴ How the Katyuris were able to appropriate this surplus cannot be said with any amount of certainty, for their copperplates do not mention any taxes. However, there are references to officers controlling tolls, ferries, roads, and landing passes on river banks, suggesting that considerable care was taken to realize dues from traders. References to traders (*vanakas*) and foremen of guilds (*śreṣṭhis*) in the inscriptions is a pointer to this. Probably the Katyuris collected considerable amounts as the middle agency in the Indo-Tibetan trade.⁵ The Katyuris did not issue any coins although contemporary inscriptions mention monetary transactions. It seems that during this period money economy played an insignificant role, for till recent times most of the local commercial transactions in Kumaon and Garhwal were carried out by the barter system and other economic activities were guided by the *jajmani* system.¹⁰

Agriculture was the main vocation of the people. Cattle-rearing was another important occupation. There were state officials to look after cows, buffaloes, and colts. Sculptures display a fairly large variety of dresses and ornaments.¹¹ Since man conceives his gods and goddesses after his own image, it seems that in some of the sculptures of the Central Himalayas the then current mode of dress and ornamentation was also represented. It appears to be particularly true in the case of some Surya reliefs. It may be noted that iconographic texts refer to a northerner's dress (*udichyavesa*) while describing the iconography of the northern variety of the Surya image. It is likely that for the local sculptor *udichyavesa* was the 'northerner' of the Central Himalayas, that is, Tangana or Sauka, while executing Surya reliefs. The sculptors show different kinds of caps and shoes, and an interesting dress called *gamta* that covered the entire body from neck to feet, which are still in vogue in the interior of Uttaranchal. It seems that a sizeable population was engaged in the production of dress and ornaments as weavers, tailors, embroiderers, dyers, printers, tanners, cobblers, goldsmiths, jewellers, and lapidaries. The potter's craft was also well developed as we come across a wide range of storage jars, lids, goblets, cooking pots, vases, basins, bowls, and spouted vessels. The pottery is wheel-turned; the finer examples are thin and well fired, and bear various incised designs.¹²

Temples, sculptures, and inscriptions of the period show that Brahmanical culture had taken deep roots in the Central Himalayas. It was due partly to Katyuri patronage, and partly to the efforts of the people and religious establishments. Thus, the Chamyadi (district Almora) stone inscription of the eleventh century in Nagari characters mentions Narayan, Svami Maha(pra)bhadeva, and a devotee of Shiva (*paramabhattacharaka*), and refers to a donation of 3,000 *drammas*.¹³ Another inscription in a village situated near Dwarahat (also in Almora) dated 1024 records installation of an image of Lakshmi by Sadhu Sahula of Srimala Samgha.¹⁴ Obviously, Srimala Samgha was associated with the worship of Lakshmi. Sculptures and temples suggest that Shiva was the most popular deity, followed by Shakti, Vishnu, Surya, Ganesha, and Kartikeya. At the same time, Panchayatana-murti, Panchayatana-*linga*,

Brahma, Kubera, Navagrahas, Dasavataras, Hari-Hara-Pitamaha, and Yakshas, among others were also revered.

The most remarkable feature of the period was the development of the local language called Central Pahari.¹⁵ The earliest dated inscription in this language is found at Dingas (district Pithoragarh). It is in Nagari characters and is dated 1105.¹⁶ In fact Sircar has traced several local terms in the Katyuri inscriptions of the ninth and tenth centuries, suggesting that like the other neo-Indo-Aryan languages, this Pahari language developed as a language distinct from Sanskrit and Prakrit.¹⁷ It may be added that Grierson's classification of the three Pahari languages calls for replacement.

II

According to Tucci, there was unrest among the Himalayan tribes of western Nepal in the eleventh century, and some of them crossed into western Tibet.¹⁸ Among them, the Khasas were predominant; as a war-like aristocracy, they controlled 'a fluctuating mass of other tribes' and established the kingdom of Guge to the south of the Sutlej.¹⁹ In due course these Nepali Khasas, referred to as Mallas, became very powerful, invaded Uttaranchal, and occupied the entire area from Garhwal in the west to Doti in the east. Their inscriptions are found at Gopesvar (district Chamoli, Garhwal) and Chalsi (district Champawat, Kumaon). According to Atkinson, one of the two Gopesvar inscriptions belonging to king Anekamalla is dated 1191.²⁰ Indrajī is 'inclined to read' this name as Asokachalla who is identified with his namesake mentioned as the king of Kama-desa in Purushottama Simha's Bodh Gaya inscription dated in the Buddha's Nirvana era 1813.²¹ Asokachalla is also mentioned in another inscription dated in Lakshmanasena era 51 (AD 1230).²² Significantly, the Balesvar copperplate inscription of Krachalla is dated in Saka 1145 (AD 1223). If the Gopesvar inscription of Saka 1113 reads Asokachalla, he cannot be identified with his namesake mentioned in the Bodh Gaya inscription because in that case we will have to accept that he ruled from at least from AD 1191 to 1269, and his reign was intervened for a short time by that of Krachalla in 1223.²³ It also goes against the testimony of the Dulu inscription in which Asokachalla figures as the son of Krachalla.²⁴ Whether the Gopesvar inscription dated in Saka era 1113 reads Anekamalla or Asokachalla, these inscriptions from Kumaon and Garhwal show that towards the close of the twelfth century Uttaranchal was invaded by the Mallas of western Nepal. It marked the liquidation of the central Katyuri kingdom, and paved the way for the rise of several smaller independent principalities in this region, each of which was confined to a few valleys. These polities struggled with one another for political supremacy till the Chandras and the Pamvaras came out victorious respectively in Kumaon and Garhwal by annihilating their adversaries.

There were large tracts of fertile valleys in Kumaon that had the potential of supporting a sizeable population that could subsist on social surplus. It is for this reason that each large valley became the nucleus of one single principality that wielded enough power to subdue settlements of adjoining smaller valleys. Consequently, Champawat, Sor, Askot, Gangolihat, Sira, Katyur, Pali, and Baramandal regions, each located in wide fertile valleys, gave rise to independent principalities.

The Katyuris who ruled from Sira (district Pithoragarh) and Doti-Dandeldhura (western Nepal) are known as Raikas. Sankritayan and Nautival believe that they represented two separate branches.²⁵ Atkinson holds that the Raikas of Sira were 'sometimes apparently one with the Raika Raja of Doti and sometimes cadets of the same house'.

Elsewhere he says that the 'Rainka Raj of Doti of the Malla family had for generations been acknowledged as suzerain of the Kali Kumaon district, and a younger branch of the same family with the title of Bam Sahi held almost independent control of Sira and Sor on the left bank of Sarju'.³⁸ Obviously, the later Kumaoni traditions compiled by Atkinson have mixed up 'Khatiya Mallas' with the Raika Katyuris, the reason being the Mala-ending names of the early Raikas. The Raikas represented the Doti-Dandeldhura branch of the Katyuris who were defeated by the Mallas sometime in the eleventh or the twelfth century.³⁹ It seems that a political vacuum in western Nepal due to the weakening of the central Katyuri rule attracted the Mallas from the east. They conquered western Nepal and subjugated almost the whole of Katyuri kingdom of Kumaon-Garhwal in the late twelfth and the early thirteenth centuries. However, the Mallas could not hold ground for a long time, for in the fourteenth century the Raikas re-emerged as the sovereign rulers of the region extending over parts of eastern Kumaon and western Nepal.⁴⁰ Their stone and copperplate inscriptions reveal the names of a score of rulers from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century.⁴¹ All of the copperplates issued by these princes purport to record grants of land in different localities in eastern Kumaon and western Nepal. Traditions indicate that the Raikas tried to seek their fortune in Kumaon, but when they suffered repeated defeats at the hands of the Chandras of Champawat, they turned their attention towards Doti. These copperplates suggest that this shift took place from the time of Bhupatimala; their charter is strikingly similar to that of the copperplates of his predecessors in language and style.

The line of Lakhanapala known from the Gananath image inscription may have continued ruling from Kartukayapura as is apparent from two inscriptions found there. These inscriptions, written in the Nagari characters of thirteenth century, record gifts of various articles for 'daily worship of the gods of Vajjanatha and Somanatha' by Mahipala and Lakhanapala, and Udayapaladeva and Lakhanapaladeva.⁴² Atkinson also mentions the names of some later Katyuri rulers recorded in the inscriptions found at Baijnath (Kartukayapura of the inscriptions). While the Raika branch of the Katyuris were engaged in western Nepal, one of their scions carved out an independent principality at Askot. According to the genealogy of Askot Katyuris, Abhavapala was the founder of this line who left Katyur for Askot in 1279.⁴³ Three other chiefs of this branch are known from their copperplates.

According to Atkinson, the later Katyuris of Sor, known as Bam (Brahma), were scions of Doti Katyuris.⁴⁴ It may be noted that Tucci and Sharma also report the presence of a petty ruling family of Bams in the Doti region.⁴⁵ It is likely that both represented the same line. A copperplate grant jointly issued by the Chandra king Jnana Chandra and Vijaya Brahma of Sor in 1420 makes it clear that the latter acknowledged suzerainty of the Chandras. Vijaya Brahma in a copperplate of 1427 styles himself as 'raja', suggesting his subordinate position, for contemporary inscriptions suggest that the title of a suzerain was '*rajadhiraja maharaja*'. Two more plates found in Sor reveal the names of Pratapa Varma (1458) and Sakti Varma (Shaka 1461). Whether or not the issuers of these plates belong to the Bam branch, their rule over Sor is beyond doubt. A junior line of the Katyuris ruled Pali (roughly modern Ranikhet tahsil, district Almora) from about the twelfth century upto the time of the Chandra prince Baja Bahadura Chandra (1638-78). Inscriptions yield more than half a dozen names of the later Katyuris of Pali.⁴⁶

There are two forts associated with the later Katyuris of Baramandal, namely, Khagmarakot and Syunarakot, the former in Almora town and the latter some nine miles north of Almora. Atkinson reports two inscriptions belonging to the later Katyuris of Baramandal. The earlier of the two, found on a ruined temple near the Suwal, contains the

name of Arjuna Deva in 1307. The second one discovered on the Almora hill records the name of Niraya Pala in 1348.³⁵

The ruling dynasty of the Gangoli region, with Manakot as their capital, is known as Manakotis. King Hamiradeva, Lingaraudeva and Dharana dei Gangola known from a Baijnath inscription of Saka 1274 (AD 1352) probably belonged to this line.³⁶ In the Jahnvi *naul* (covered water reservoir) at Gangoli-hat, there is an inscription that, among other things, records three dates: 1264, 1275, and 1277, together with the names of queen Vilaisi and king Dhira.³⁷ Two copperplates found in Gangoli region reveal the names of two princes, namely, Prithvi Chandra Rajavara (1610), and Mahendrapala Rajavara (1622).³⁸ Whether the Chami copperplate (near Bageshwar, district Almora) of Indra Rajavara issued in 1594 belongs to this Rajavara line of rulers cannot be said with certainty.³⁹ Since the junior line of the Katyuris adopted the title Rajavara, it is likely that these Rajavara rulers were Katyuris. In that case the Manakotis were different from the Rajavaras for, according to Atkinson, the former were the 'Chandrabansi Rajputs' who migrated from Doti.⁴⁰

III

The origin of the Chandras is shrouded in obscurity, like their genealogy and chronology. This issue has been discussed at length by Atkinson, Goetz, and the present author.⁴¹ Both Atkinson and Goetz accept the popular tradition that Soma Chandra was the founder of the Chandra dynasty. Atkinson's study is based on the traditional account that he himself doubted. Goetz has used mainly temple architecture of Kumaon in support of his arguments, in addition to the then available epigraphical sources. However, recent studies in the temple architecture, discovery of new temples, and of inscriptions have shown that the tradition representing Soma Chandra as the founder of the Chandra dynasty is a myth, and the historicity of Soma Chandra himself is doubtful.⁴² However, there is another tradition that points to Thor/Thohara Chandra as the founder of the Chandra dynasty. It is said that his line became extinct after his grandson. Thereupon, Jnana Chandra, who was a direct descendant of Thohara Chandra's uncle, was installed as king at Champawat.⁴³ This tradition is supported by epigraphical material at our disposal, albeit indirectly.

Available epigraphical sources indicate the existence of several chiefs bearing the surname 'Chandra' who flourished in Kumaon before Jnana Chandra. Their mutual relationship and chronology cannot be determined in the present state of our knowledge. However, it is certain that Abhaya Chandra was ruling from Champawat at least from 1360 to 1378. The dynastic rule of the Chandras continued almost uninterrupted from this time upto 1790. On the basis of newly discovered epigraphical and archival material the Chandra period of Kumaoni history may be divided into the following two phases: (a) the formative stage with Champawat as capital (1250–1525); (b) the consolidated kingdom with Almora as capital (1525–1790).

There is a large number of stone and copperplate inscriptions that are helpful in reconstructing the history of Kumaon from the time of Kalyana Chandra I (1286) to that of Bhishma Chandra (1512–30) who initiated transfer of the capital from Champawat to Almora between 1525 and 1530. There are copious literary, archival, and inscriptional source materials for the second phase. However, these sources give conflicting accounts of historical events, particularly in relation to the genealogical and chronological order of the ruling family. Nevertheless, inscriptional evidence enables us to form a fair idea of the chronology of the Chandra rulers from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century.

That the later Katyuris continued to rule in different parts of Garhwal is evident from inscriptions in Gopesvar (Garhwal), which point to the existence of several chiefs during this period.⁴⁸ On the basis of the combined testimony of ancient forts, inscriptions, and temples, it can be suggested that several petty forces emerged in Garhwal owing to the downfall of the central Katyuris.⁴⁹ According to local traditions, there were fifty-two principalities in Garhwal.⁵⁰ Dabral believes in fact that the number of these principalities, known as *gadha*, far exceeded sixty-four.⁵¹ On the basis of old records and traditions, Gairola suggests the existence of five ruling families in ancient Garhwal.⁵² However, with the exception of the Pamvaras of Srinagar, no authentic records of these dynasties are available.

In the early seventeenth century *Manodayakavya* and local traditions, the Pamvaras are referred to as *Chandra-vamsi*.⁵³ It is interesting to note that the dynastic name Pamvara occurs only in the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ There are several works based on traditions, literary sources (like the *Manodayakavya*, *Ramayana Pradipa*, *Gadha Parivridha Vamsa Baijayanti*, and the *Gadharajavamsakavya Vamsavalis*), and *vamsavalis* collected by the British.⁵⁵ However, these sources are not unanimous about the origin or the genealogical order of the dynasty. According to one tradition, Bhogadatta, who came from Ahmedabad in search of a lucrative profession, was the founder of this dynasty. According to another, someone from Dharanagari came to Garhwal and started practising agriculture. His son Bhauna (Bhavanapala) managed to carve out a principality for himself. Still another tradition makes Kanakapala 'who came from Gujarat' the founder of a ruling dynasty in Garhwal. His twenty-fourth descendant was Sonapala who had his capital in the Bhillang valley. He married his daughter to Kadilapala, a Pamvara prince who had come to Garhwal on a pilgrimage, giving him in dowry the province of Chandpurgarh. These traditions, literary sources, and genealogical tables have not been examined critically by scholars who have published the dynastic account of the Garhwal chiefs. Therefore, nothing can be said with certainty about the dynastic history of Garhwal till Jagatipala, who issued a copperplate grant in 1455, and who is styled as Rajavara.⁵⁶ It must be noted, however, that the junior line of the later Katyuris in Kumaon adopted the title Rajavara. It is quite likely that Jagatipala was one of the later Katyuris. In that case Ajayapala, the first chief who shifted his capital from Chandpurgarhi to Srinagar, may have been his lineal descendant. In Beckett's list of the Garhwal rajas, Ajayapala figures as a great-grandson of Jagatipala.⁵⁷ On the basis of the combined testimony of literary sources, inscriptions, and the *vamsavalis*, it is possible to work out a chronology.⁵⁸

IV

A study of the dynastic accounts of the Raikas of Sira-Doti, Chandras of Champawat-Almora, and Pamvaras of Srinagar suggests that these dynasties made it customary to wage wars against one another.⁵⁹

It is an open issue whether the post-Katyuri Kumaoni and Garhwali polities maintained a regular army. On the basis of the travelogues of early European visitors and the works of the Garhwali court poets, it has been suggested that the Garhwal chiefs maintained a regular army. We have some reservations in accepting this view, for in the list of officers under different Pamvara chiefs the office of army commander is not a regular feature.⁶⁰ Moreover, we have no information as to where this army was stationed. Hardwicke's narrative also lends support to this suggestion, albeit indirectly. He says that the soldiers of the Garhwal raja were 500 in number. They were 'distributed through the several districts

to assist in the collection of the country'. Those who were stationed at Srinagar were sort of irregular troops, for 'no attention is shewn either to their dress or discipline, and they are paid with little regularity'.⁵⁷ It seems that for the defence of the Terai-Bhabhar and the Dun region, the Panyaras maintained a regular army, which may have included soldiers from the plains, as we notice in the case of Kumaon.⁵⁸ However, for the hills they seem to have relied on a militia that was formed by summoning villagers of certain areas as and when needed. Terms like Lobhi and Bamdhani used for soldiers hailing from Lobha and Badhana regions respectively are indicative of that.⁵⁹

In Kumaon, particularly under the Chandras, there existed a very clever and rewarding means of recruiting militiamen. During the period under reference, Kumaoni society was traditionally divided into two factions, namely, Mahara and Phartyala, who were in constant conflict with each other. This conflict was legitimized by annual ritual mock-fights between these two factions, which were arranged in several places all over Kumaon. Stone flakes (called *phiphar*) and pebbles were used for striking, and shields made of reed and *malu* leaves (*Bauhinia vahlii*) were used for defence. These mock-fights often resulted in the death of a few fighters on both sides. (Such mock-fights used to take place until recently at Devi Dhura, Masi, Patia, Pilkholi, and Bagwali Pokhar, but not so fiercely.) It seems that during the Chandra period outstanding fighters were identified during the mock-fights, and were recruited as militiamen at the time of war.

The Katyuri inscriptions show that there was an elaborate administrative organization. A long list of different officers indicates that the king discharged his functions through an hierarchy. Naturally, there were many intermediaries between the ruler and the ruled. This hierarchy gave the king a towering stature and served as a screen between him and his subjects. During the post-Katyuri period these officers were replaced by various individuals—the 'dominant' group—who were drawn from the commoners. All copperplate inscriptions of the post-Katyuri chiefs of Kumaon and Garhwal enumerate certain individuals as witnesses of the land grant. Their personal and caste names indicate their influence and the reputation they commanded in public. These individuals represented an aristocracy that could be equated with the 'dominant' group of Dumont in a restricted sense.⁶⁰ Folklore and local tradition of the Central Himalayas are replete with heroic deeds of various dominant individuals.⁶¹

The king held the 'dominant' persons in high esteem, and always banked upon their support in state affairs. There are many examples of services rendered by them to the crown in times of distress. There were several factors responsible for the rise of these 'dominant' persons, like personal valour, sense of justice, wealth, and social or religious or political leadership. There are many episodes preserved in local traditions which show that these people became at times more powerful and resourceful than the rulers themselves. Under these circumstances the royal authority was bound to weaken, especially when there was no regular army. Obviously, the chiefs could not have wielded any significant amount of control and power over the land and the people. The 'dominant' persons had the real power in state affairs, and they gave legitimacy to kingship. The kings negotiated their right to rule with these 'dominant' persons by incorporating them in the body politic.⁶²

Kingship in the post-Katyuri principalities appears to have emerged from below. The king's powers were derived from the 'dominant' persons who in turn owed their powers and spheres of influence to their respective kin groups. This accounts for the use of simple and mild language in the charters, and a few demands and obligations, which too may not have been realized stringently. After all the 'dominant' persons themselves, along with

their kinsmen were to meet these demands. In anthropological jargon we are confronted here with a situation between a 'tribal organization' and a 'chiefdom'.⁶³

Ecology played a key role in the rise of locally dominant people. The mountainous country with its network of valleys lent itself to the development of many small distinct communities. Each valley being a micro-region, both in human and geographical terms, its inhabitants formed a largely self-contained economic and, to some extent, cultural entity. In the absence of a powerful central authority, these micro-regions became the nuclei of semi-autonomous settlements under the leadership of a few 'dominant' persons. Since the chiefdom under reference had no regular army, they had no option but to incorporate these locally dominant groups. That was why the post-Katyuri principalities of Kumaon and Garhwal were constructed on a control system centred on their respective capitals, tying together a number of epicentric subordinate principalities.

Viewed from the standpoint of socio-political evolution, the 'royal function' assumes special significance because no institution can discharge 'royal function' without legitimacy. It is for this reason that the 'dominant' persons in Kumaon and Garhwal recognized and strengthened the institution of kingship from whom emanated the validation of their own authority. Conversely, the ruling chiefs needed an agency that would legitimize their kingship, and through which they could enforce their rule over a larger territory. The ruling chiefs found this agency in the dominant persons, and patronized them by incorporating them into the framework of state administration and kingly prestations.

The words 'king', 'kingship', 'kingdom', and 'prince' are used for the post-Katyuri rulers, but 'chief', 'chieftain', 'chieftainship', and 'chiefdom' are more appropriate. In their copperplates the terms *raja*, *rajadhiraja-maharaja*, etc., are used by the post-Katyuri rulers. Our problem is to interpret these terms in relation to the politics found in post-Katyuri Kumaon and Garhwal. These politics can be placed in the category of 'secondary chiefdoms'.⁶⁴ At least three major factors were responsible for the formation of these 'secondary chiefdoms':

- (1) Circumscribed by mountain folds, forests, and rivers, the inhabitants of the valleys developed their own way of socio-economic and political systems.
- (2) The Central Himalayan valleys offered great potential for rich agricultural production with minimum effort. Till recent times residents of each valley made combined efforts to construct river bunds and canals. Proper distribution of water from canals involved community management and legitimate supervision, for which certain managerial positions were evolved. In due course the people entrusted with the management of these efforts became dominant enough to dictate terms to the community itself.
- (3) Trade activities in the rugged Himalayan tracts were full of hazards, and required great managerial skills. Only courageous and adventurous people could undertake these activities. Traders dealing with essential commodities were dominant members of society. Surviving records show that the chiefs used to collect various products by way of state demands, notably fruits, foodgrains, goats, woollen products, forest produce, salt, honey, ghee, iron, copper, gold, etc. Obviously, many of these goods, like salt and gold, were procured by means of trade.⁶⁵

These three factors were responsible for the genesis of supervisory personnel—the dominant group—in each valley, which ultimately led to the formation of a ranked society through the integrative process of the chiefdom.⁶⁶

However, these chiefdoms could not have functioned adequately without a notion of ideology which informed 'the modes through which exploitation and domination in social

relations are legitimised', and which operated as much through the forms of social life as through a system of shared beliefs and values.⁶⁷ The two dominant ideologies of the period may be summed up as follows:

- (1) Those who claimed to be immigrants from the plains were considered to be superior and assigned higher status ritually, socially, and politically.⁶⁸
- (2) The cult of local deities like Golu, Ganganath, and Bholanath, belonging to 'little tradition', and Nanda Devi, Badrinatha, and Kedaranatha, belonging to the 'great tradition', strengthened the chiefdoms, for some of these deities were held as the members of the royal family, or else the ruling chiefs were taken as their incarnations.⁶⁹

This twin ideology was practised and popularized by certain Brahmans who resorted to 'mytho-praxis' in order to perpetuate their own interest in the body politic. The dominant persons who acted in accordance with the concept of 'royal function' subscribed to this ideology.⁷⁰ It was used as the central socio-political mechanism for establishing the politico-cultural hegemony of the so-called few 'immigrant high caste' Brahman and Kshatriya families who controlled the political society of Kumaon and Garhwal. However, when 'others' became familiar with this mytho-praxis, they did not challenge it. Rather, it was used to gain access to higher socio-political status. This was the dynamics of a simple mountain society.

Our records show that the Kumaoni and Garhwali chiefdoms were not subordinate to any political power. It is amazing that they maintained their sovereignty against the Delhi sultans and the Mughal emperors. It may be noted that the hill chiefs were not so ambitious as to pose a threat to the hegemony of the Delhi rulers. Their principalities were neither rich nor populous, and had no monumental temples and cities. Moreover, the Kumaoni and Garhwali chiefs occasionally paid tribute to the Mughal rulers, which made their mutual relationship cordial.⁷¹ Indeed, at times both the Kumaoni and the Garhwali chiefs sought legitimacy from the Mughal court in order to maintain their territorial integrity. It appears that to impose their hegemony sometimes the Mughals themselves encouraged these hill chiefs to wage wars against each other. However, they also protected these chiefs against the Rohilas. It is in this light that we have to view the relationship of the hill chiefs with the contemporary Mughal rulers.⁷²

V

In course of time, both the ruling dynasties changed their respective capitals, the Kumaonis from Champawat to Almora, and the Garhwalis from Chandpurgarhi to Srinagar. In Kumaon the transfer of capital took place due to the overriding pressure of the dominant people of Champawat—the *Chara Budhas* (Four Eldermen) belonging to the Kshatriya varna.⁷³ Moreover, the Kumaoni court was plagued with factionalism between two rival groups: the Maharas and the Phartyalas.⁷⁴ The Garhwali court was also divided into two factions: the Dobhals and the Khanduris.⁷⁵ Their intrigues, coupled with internecine wars between Kumaon and Garhwal, and occasional inroads of the neighbouring polities, gave the dominant groups ample opportunities of making new alignments and realignments in different situations.

Social stratification in Kumaon and Garhwal needs to be explained in this context. The Kumaoni records indicate that the institutionalized bodies of Brahmans known as Chara-thana or Chauthani (meaning four houses or establishments) and Chhai-gaura or Chhai-ghariya (six houses) represented, respectively, four and six clans of the Brahmans.⁷⁶

The Garhwali records suggest the existence of Pancha-purohita, an institutionalized body of five priestly houses.⁷⁷ However, scholars working on Garhwali history have not taken any notice of this institution.⁷⁸ Garhwali traditions refer to two main Brahman groups, namely, the Sarolas and the Gangadis.⁷⁹

Originally, the Chauthanis were four in number and the Sarolas twelve. Their number continued to swell with the passage of time. The original Chauthanis lost their status to others in the process; the Garga *gotri* Joshis became the informal leaders of the Chauthani group though they were a native subcaste and the antecedents of their founder were low.⁸⁰ Likewise, in Garhwal the Kanyuris or Khanduris, though ranked as Brahmans, were 'hill or pahari Kayaths or writer caste'.⁸¹ They were included among the Sarolas.⁸² The Chauthanis and the Sarolas were thus incorporative groups of Brahman elite. Whenever a particular Brahman group became dominant, it was incorporated. The respective ritual clients (*jajmans*) of such dominant groups were also elevated to the status of high-caste Kshatriyas, for only the high-caste groups had exclusive control over high offices. Despite the fact that these Brahman communities forged alliances on a politico-social plane, they maintained commensal distance with one another. At this stage, the rulers of Kumaon and Garhwal played a key role by issuing decrees. It became obligatory for all the people to accept food cooked by the Rasyara Pandes in the case of Kumaon and by the Sarola Brahmans in the case of Garhwal.⁸³

Kumaoni copperplate inscriptions and traditions reveal that the institutionalized body of the Kshatriyas was known as Chara-budha (four eldersmen) and Bara-adhikaris (officers having twelve rights, alternatively, a group of twelve offices).⁸⁴ These were also incorporative institutions, like those of the Brahmans. As regards Garhwal, there were innumerable forts, each under the leadership of a dominant person. The Kshatriyas in Garhwal traced their origin to one or another dominant person. This obviated the necessity of aligning with an institutionalized body of high-caste Kshatriyas. This may possibly account for the absence of an institutionalized body of Kshatriyas in Garhwal. The list of high-caste Kshatriyas appearing in the works of Ram leaves no room for doubt that several of them were not immigrants. In any case, these high-caste Brahmans and Kshatriyas emerged out of caste fluidity.⁸⁵ Any higher status depended on the presence of a contrasting lower status; those who could not play an effective role in the socio-political scene were dubbed as indigenous Khasas and relegated to a lower status. The Khasa myth has been deconstructed.⁸⁶

In the chiefdoms of Kumaon and Garhwal the Vaishyas appear to have been the least influential in the absence of an urban society. Interestingly, the revenue records of the Raikas and Chandras of Kumaon refer to the existence of only three varnas, namely, Bamana (Brahman), Khasi (Kshatriya), and Duma (Shudra). In this connection it may be noted that agriculture in Kumaon and Garhwal was practised by the Kshatriyas who were also known as '*jimadaras*' (holders of land). Trade was carried on mostly by the Sauka-Bhotivas. It is generally believed that the Shah or Sah community of the Central Himalayas represents the Vaishya varna. However, the Sahs appear to be closer to the Kshatriyas in their socio-ritual behaviour. In fact many of them claim to be high-caste Kshatriya.⁸⁷ Associated with the Sah community are the goldsmiths (*sunars*). In Kumaoni copperplates we come across the names of several scribes with the surnames Sudara, Sunara, and Sahu. Since it required professional skill to inscribe on a copperplate, it may be suggested that all of these persons belonged to the same profession. It is likely that in the remote past the sunars and some of the Sahus belonged to the same community. In course of time the sunars were ranked lower in status. Whether it was a case of downward social mobility in the case of the sunars, or of upward mobility in the case of the Sahs needs further investigation.

146. *Vayu-Purāṇa* (*Vay. Pu.*), 30.261; 54.107–108; etc. (Ananda Rama Sanskrit Series, 1905).
147. D.R. Patil, *CHVP*, pp. 116–117.
148. *VR.*, 2.74.23; 2.70.29; 2.83.16 pv.
149. *Mbh.*, *Anuśā RV* 83. 18.
150. Agrawala, *IKP*, pp. 224–225.
151. *RV* 1.121.2 5.29.8; 5.37.3; *YV*, 12.105; *Tait. Sam.*, 3.4.11.
152. *RV*, 1.161.10; *Jaiminiya Brahmana*, 2.267; *YV*, 22.8.
153. Randhava, *AAHI*, pp. 298–301.
154. *Vay. Pu.* 69.207; Citrava, M.M. Siddhesvara Shastri, 1964, *Prācina Caritra Kosa*, *Bharatiya Caritra Kosa Mandala*, Poona, P.438, Col. 2.
155. *Kur. Pu.* 11. 20.42.
156. *Ibid.*, II. 20.47.
157. Aiyer, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
158. *RV.*, 1.38.12; 1.73.9; 9.107.8; 105.2; 10.101.7; *AV*, 10.4.21; *Tait. Sam.* 71.1.2; *AV.*, 4.4.8.
159. *RV.*, 10.101.7.
160. *RV.*, 1.163.1.
161. *RV.*, 6.69.4.
162. *YV*, 29.44.
163. *RV.*, 6.47.31.
164. *RV.*, 6.75.13.
165. *RV.*, 1.22.3.
166. *RV.*, 3.36.6.
167. *RV.*, 1.25.3.
168. *RV.*, 6.47.23–24.
169. *RV.*, 8.25.22.
170. *AV.*, 2.14.6.
171. *RV.*, 2.43.2.
172. *RV.*, 5.58.7.
173. *RV.*, 3.61.2–3.
174. Aiyer, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
175. Balavir Acharya, *RBSA*, p. 124; *Tait. Br.* 3.8.1; *Tait. Sam.* 7.3.17.
176. Shubhra Shanna, 1985, *Life in the Upanishada* (LIU) Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, p. 151; *Br. Up.* 6.2.13; *Kath. Up.* 1.3.5; *Sv. Up.* 2.9; *Ch. Up.*, 5.1.12.
177. *Br. Up.* 1.1.
178. *Ch.Up.*, 4.2.3–4.
179. *Kaus. Su.*, 17.22; *Par. G.Su* 315.1–4; *Hir. G.Su* 1.12.1; *Ap.G.Su.* 8.22.16–17; *Gobho.G.Su.* 4.5.20.
180. Ram Gopal, *IVK*, p. 107.
181. *VR.*, 2.45.14
182. *VR.*, 2.97.24.
183. *VR.*, 2.83.5.

184. VR., 2.1.28.
185. VR., 6.43.3.
186. VR., 6.8.2.2.
187. VR., 6.90.28–29.
188. VR., 6.11.30.
189. VR., 3.22.22.
190. VR., 5.6.4–5; 2.26.15; 2.97.24; 2.39.10.
191. VR., 2.71.14.
192. VR., 2.45.140.
193. VR., 2.68.10.
194. VR., 1.53.19; 1.6.22.
195. S.N., Vyas, *IRA.*, pp. 241–242.
196. VR., 343.41.
197. *MBh.*, *Van. Pv.* 72.28; *Vir. Pv* 12.6–7.
198. Sukhamay Bhattacharya, *MKS*, p. 165.
199. *MBh. Sabh. Pv*, 5.120.
200. *Vay. Pu.*, 9.42–44; 9.46–47.
201. DR., Patil, *CHW*, p. 115.
202. *Vay. Pu.* 80.15; 57.68.
203. *Vay. Pu.*, 99.10; 82.14.
204. *Kur. Pu.*, 2.26.45; 2.33.31.
205. Agrawala, V.S., *ICT.*, p. 219.
206. Aiyer, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
207. *YV* 29.30.
208. *AV.J* 3.22.3–4,6.
209. *AV.*, 4.36.9.
210. *AV.*, 6.38.2; 12.1.25.
211. *AV.*, 6.70 2.
212. *AV.*, 9.3.17.
213. *AV.*, 10.1.32.
214. *RV.*, 4.4.1; 1.138.2.
215. *RV.*, 10.44.9.
216. *Sat. Br.*, 1.2.3.9.
217. *Gobh.Gr. Su.* 4.5.29.
218. VR., 5.6.32.
219. VR., 2.100.50.
220. VR., 356.31; 6.16.6–8.
221. VR., 5.47.20; 2.21.54; 6.13.19; 6.24.38.
222. VR., 2 74 .35.
223. VR., 5.6.5.
224. VR., 5.1.64.
225. VR., 5.19.18.
226. VR., 1.6.23.

cooking and other domestic uses. Items like trough, dish, basin, bowl, bucket, and pot were made of leather, wood, and leaves too.¹⁰⁴

Cattle-rearing, sheep-farming, and production of woollen materials were other vocations of the people. That animal husbandry was an attractive vocation follows from the popularity of folk deities like Kalbishta, Chaumu, and Badhan, who were believed to have been protectors of animals.¹⁰⁵ State demands like *ghodalo* (related to horses), *kukuralo* (related to dogs), *bakaro* (goats), ghee, and *kamalo* (blankets) are mentioned in the copperplate grants and revenue records belonging to the Kumaoni polities. The coppersmiths and ironsmiths were obviously in demand as the household items made during this period were largely metallic. An interesting feature was the construction of buildings embellished with highly ornate wooden doors, windows, door jambs, lintels, etc., showing a flourishing state of carpentry.¹⁰⁶

Archival records and copperplate grants belonging to the Kumaoni chiefs, particularly the Raikas and the Chandras, supply valuable information about the economic resource management of this region. A four-tier socio-economic organization can be visualized. The lowest class was that of *seukas* and *butakaras* who formed the labour class. They received land and some amount of cash in return for their services. Above them were the *kainis* who by and large were tenant-cultivators, but they also owned land. The term *kaini* appears to be a Kumaoni rendering of Sanskrit *kinasa*, originally meaning a Vaishya peasant and later on a Shudra agriculturist.¹⁰⁷ The *kainis* in Kumaon belonged to the Shudra *varna* in later evidence. Associated with the *kainis* were the artisans who subsisted partly on agriculture and partly on their own craftsmanship. Above the *kainis* were the landowning agriculturists and absentee landowners, including all the state functionaries who received landgrants. At the top was the chief himself who was considered as the ultimate owner of the land.¹⁰⁸

The early British administrators noted four types of land tenureship in Kumaon during the Chandra period: *thatwan* (proprietor of *that*, landholding), *khaikar*, and *sirthan* (tenants of *thatwan*), and *kaini* (sort of a serf, akin to a household slave).¹⁰⁹ However, Kumaoni source materials refer to three kinds of land tenureship: *kaini* (tenant-cultivator), *asami* (landholder who paid different kinds of taxes as a landowner), and jagir-holder (who received a rent-free land grants, sometimes mentioned as *that*). The British account of traditional land tenures actually legitimized the ownership of land by certain 'dominant' persons during the colonial rule.¹¹⁰ The land tenures were 'invented' in keeping with the racial image of the Central Himalayas. The so-called 'high caste immigrant' ('dominant') persons and their close allies claimed *thatwan* (proprietary) tenure, while the 'Khasas' were assigned *sirthan* and *khaikar* (tenant-cultivator) tenures, and Doms the *kaini* (serf) tenure.

The Kumaoni sources reveal that people were required to contribute to the maintenance of the state and its functionaries, both in kind and cash. Demands in kind depended on local, regional, or ecological considerations. This can be seen from the revenue demands made on the people living in different ecological niches: for example, the demand of goat, salt, birch bark, gold, etc. from the Sauka-Bhotiyas living in high altitudes; agricultural products, such as different kinds of grains, lentils, cotton, oil, etc., from the people living in the low-lying rich agricultural valleys; and copper and iron from areas where mines of these metals existed. There was yet another ecosystem—the mountainous forests—from which people collected honey, tubers, wild fruits, etc. The Terai-Bhabhar region was rich in pastures where people grazed cattle and sheep. Some of the Chandra copperplates refer to the demand of *kamalo* (woollen blankets), ghee, etc., from the people inhabiting the Terai-Bhabhar region, obviously as grazing tax.¹¹¹

Significantly, caste-specific demands were also made, including the demands on the Brahmans, Khasiyas, and Dumas. The Masamoli Josis, who were noted astrologers, had to supply ephemeris, and the Deuva Kshatriyas curds and tubers. The artisans had to supply their respective products: the ironsmiths supplied iron hearths; the coppersmiths supplied copper utensils; the carpenters supplied wooden vessels and special types of poles used in palanquins; the potters supplied vases, and those who worked on leaves, reeds, and such material, supplied mats and umbrellas made of leaves and reeds. There was a special class of manual labourers who rendered physical service such as ploughing, carrying, grinding, etc.

There was a three-tier distributional structure of economic resources: the local or village level, the provincial level, and the central or the chief's level. The local or village-level distribution system was based mainly on *jajmani* or 'reciprocity'. The provincial governors, called *iradara* or *sikadara*, and the chief collected different items as revenue demand in kind.¹¹²

Some of the artisans and petty functionaries who discharged their duties at the village level are mentioned in the revenue records and the copperplate inscriptions of the Kumaoni chiefs: menial labourer, potter, a sort of miner who supplied clay used in plastering or else in rituals, ironsmith, coppersmith, musical instrument player, trumpet-player, singer, carpenter, watchman, water-supplier, messenger, and police constables, known respectively as *seuka*, *kunala*, *gariya*, *lutara*, *bajariya-bajadara*, *turi*, *bakhariya*, *voda*, *pahari-chaukidara*, *paneliya*, *jyuliya*, and *ayado-payado*. It is to be noted that most of these persons belonged to Silpakara (Shudra) community, and were proficient in different trades. It seems that the state, recognizing the merit and indispensability of these artisans in a basically rural and agricultural society with limited resources, made certain provisions for their maintenance in the form of obligations imposed on the inhabitants of a specified area (often a village). In return, the artisans served the people with their professional skills. It would, therefore, appear that the state promoted the *jajmani* system for its purposes at the village level. The technical skill of these artisans undoubtedly added to the increase in surplus production, and thereby the tax-paying capacity of the people.¹¹³

At the provincial level, people living within the province had to supply a certain quantity or amount of items. Some of the principal demands in kind that the provincial governors collected on behalf of the chief were grains, cotton, honey, ghee, vegetables, tubers, wild fruits, milk products, metal utensils, and different varieties of goat. Certain areas were earmarked for the supply of provisions for the maintenance of temple establishments patronized by the state.

At the central or the chief's level the main demands were termed as agricultural tax (*sirti*) and protection tax (*rachhya*). *Sirti* was assessed in terms of cash and *rachhya* in gold. Apart from these two major demands, there were dues related to *hajara* (central warehouse), *tika* (benevolences), tolls from river ports, fines realized from criminals, among others. In addition, specific demands were made from certain groups of people; each *kaini*, for example, had to pay a fixed amount of cash on the birth of his first son and the marriage of his first daughter. They were also subjected to additional payment in cash for the customary dress of the raja, and his functionaries. These were termed as *jhagudi*, *amgudi*, and *saropa*. Junior functionaries of the chiefdoms such as Padhana and Kamina were also subjected to some amount of dues in cash. However, reference to certain demands made in terms of cash does not necessarily mean payment in cash.¹¹⁴ In all probability, some of the taxes that were imposed on all subjects were assessed in terms of cash. Such an arrangement reduced, if not obviated, the possibility of exploitation of peasants by the tax-collecting

authorities. This suggestion is further strengthened by the fact that the main demand in cash was agricultural tax. In this connection mention may be made of the *patta bahi* of Maharana Raja Simha, which refers to demand of *khada-lakada* (supply of fodder and wood for the royal camp) assessed in terms of cash. We can call it a partly monetized society in which 'whole, vast, and important activities of the economic domain operate without the monetary command over goods and service'.¹¹⁵

This summary of economic resource management in Kumaon is characteristic of a geographically circumscribed hill chiefdom. We have no such information about Garhwal. However, some of the demands occurring in the Garhwali copperplates are similar to those of the Kumaoni records, indicating that conditions in Garhwal were more or less similar. The existence of a somewhat similar economic organization may be suggested for Garhwal as well.

VII

We have seen that the polities of Kumaon and Garhwal survived without any permanent military set-up or physical force. It seems that they could hold ground internally on account of their integrative approach towards ambitious centrifugal elements. The dominant people in every region were incorporated into the polity. This strengthened the authority of the chief at the top, and of the dominant person at the local or regional level. We have also seen that the demands made by these polities were adaptive to social, economic, and ecological conditions of the tax-payers, and were not perceived to be oppressive. Moreover, the state involved surplus producers of almost all ecological niches within these polities in economic activities by promoting an efficient economic resource management based on reciprocity and a redistributive system. The contentment of the common people with their lot could be one reason for survival of the chiefdoms for centuries without any permanent physical force.

APPENDIX

RULING DYNASTIES IN KUMAON AND GARHWAL

The Raika Chiefs

Ajaipala		Harisahi I	1593
Niraipala	1352, 1362	Ramasahi	1609, 1616
Nagamala	1378, 1393	Rudrasahi	1633, 1637
Ripumala	1410, 1412	Pahadisahi	1648, 1649
Anandamala	1430, 1438	Vikramasahi	1671, 1685
Samsaramala	1442	Mandhatasahi	1690, 1719
Kalanamala	1443	Raghunathasahi	1772
Raimala	1539	Harisahi II	1718
Bhupatimala	1558	Krishnasahi	1778

The Later Katyuris of Katyur (District Bageshwar)

Udayapala Deva		Indrapala	
Charunapala Deva		Lakhanapala	
Agapara Deva		Udayapala	
Jhakatha Deva		Vasantapala	
Mahipala		Balinikulapala	
Indra Deva Rajbar		Vijayapala	
Tribhuvanapala		Sukhaladeva	

The Later Katyuris of Ascot (District Pithoragarh)

Abhayapala	1279	Bharati Pala	1394
Nirai Pala	1353	Tilaka Pala	1421

The Later Katyuris of Sor (District Pithoragarh)

Jnana Chandra	1420	Pratapa Varma	1458
Vijaya Brahma	1427	Sakti Varma	Saka 1461

The Later Katyuris of Pali (District Almora)

Sadhuvaradeva	1084	Sudharadeva	1316, 1318
Ananta Pala Deva	1122	Manadeva	1337
Gurjaradeva	1257	Somadeva	1349, 1354
Vijayadeva			

The Chandras of Kumaon

Kalyana Chandra I	1208	Lakshmi Chandra	1525-42
Karma Chandra		Dilipa Chandra	Saka 1542
Abhaya Chandra	1282-98	Vijaya Chandra	1547
Jnana Chandra I	1301-42	Trimalla Chandra	1550-57
Vikrama Chandra	1345-56	Baja Bahadura Chandra	1564-96
Bharati Chandra	1366-99	Udyota Chandra	1604-13
Ratana Chandra	Saka 1369	Jnana Chandra II	1623-25
Kirtti Chandra	1427	Jagata Chandra	1631-40

Pratapa Chandra	1432	Devi Chandra	1722-25
Bhishma Chandra	1434-52	Ajita Chandra	
Kalyana Chandra II	Saka 1452	Kalyana Chandra IV	1653-68
Rama Chandra	1460	Dipa Chandra	1669-96
Kalyana Chandra III	1467	Mohana Chandra	1700
Rudra Chandra	1490-1519	Mahendra Chandra	Saka 1700

The Pamvaras of Srinagar (District Garhwal)

Jagatipala	1455	Prithvipatisaha	1631-67
Ajayapala	1500-48	Phatepatisaha	1667-1716
Sahajapala	1548-80	Upendrasaha	1716-17
Balabhadrasaha	1580-91	Pradipasaha	1717-72
Manasaha	1591-1611	Lalitasaha	1772-80
Syamasaha	1611-24	Jaikirttisaha	1780-85
Mahipatisaha	1624-31	Pradyumnasaha	1785-1804

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CHAPTER 21

State and Society in the Himachal

J.S. Grewal and Veena Sachdeva

The oldest traditions in the Western Himalayas refer to a time when petty chiefs exercised authority either as independent rulers or under the suzerainty of a paramount power. They were known as Thakurs and Ranas. The Thakurs appear to have risen into local power from among the indigenous people. The Ranas came at a later period and conquered territories from the Thakurs. In all probability, the Ranas represented the Kshatriyas of the Vedic times.¹

The process of state formation in the Western Himalayas began before the Christian era. The states of Kashmir and Kangra (known as Jalandhara or Trigarta) were founded before the fourth century BC. About 1000 years later, Hieun Tsang talks about the states of Urasha (Hazara), Parnotsa (Punchn), Rajapuri (Rajauri), and Kuluta (Kulu) in addition to Kashmir and Kangra.² Before the eleventh century at least half a dozen more states had been founded: Chamba, Jammu, Kishtwar, Basohli, Bilaspur, Suket, and Nurpur.

New states continued to emerge during the medieval period. Their number in fact was very considerable: Jaswan, Guler, Siba, Datarpur, Bhimbar, Khari Khariyali, Jasrota, Mankot (Ramkot), Lakhanpur, Samba, Bhau, Bhoti, Akhnur, Dalpatpur, Tirikot, Basohli, Bhadu, Bhadarwah, and Mandi. Nearly all of these were offshoots of the existing states, or offshoots of offshoots. Many of these were established at the cost of Thakurs and Ranas: Datarpur, Jasrota, Mankot, Samba, and Basohli, for example. However, the process of the subjugation of Thakurs and Ranas was rather gradual and many of them survived into the medieval period, which was an important factor in politics.³ Nearly all the new rulers in the Western Himalayas claimed to be Surajbansi or Chandarbansi Rajputs. Even when the new states were founded by non-Rajputs, their successors in due course claimed Rajput status, as in the case of Kulehr and Bangahal, which had been founded by Brahmans.

The rulers of the hills were never completely isolated from the politics of the plains. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries the rulers of the plains, both Turkish and Rajput, had hostile or friendly contact with the chiefs of the hills. Some of the sultans of Delhi in the later period tried to establish their suzerainty over the hills though without much success. During the Mughal period the suzerainty of the emperors over the hill chiefs was well

established, with the implication of their political subordination. The mantle of the Mughals fell on the Afghan and Sikh rulers of the Punjab during the late eighteenth century. The political contacts of the hills with the plains had some direct and indirect influence on the polity and society in the hills.

Hutchison and Vogel divide the Punjab hill states into three groups: the western, between the rivers Indus and Jhelum; the central, between the rivers Jhelum and Ravi, and the eastern, between the rivers Ravi and Sutlej. In their eastern group there are fourteen principalities: Kangra, Guler, Jaswan, Siba, Datarpur, Nurpur, Chamba, Suket, Mandi, Kulu, Kulehr, Bangahal, Shahpur, and Kotla. The oldest and the most important of all these principalities were Kangra, Chamba, and Kulu—all falling within the present state of Himachal Pradesh.⁴ We propose to concentrate on the state and society in these three principalities from the eleventh to the eighteenth centuries.

I

At the beginning of the eleventh century the state known by the name of Jalandhara or Trigarta lay between the rivers Ravi and Sutlej, with its territories in the plains and the hills, and with its capitals at Jalandhar and Nagarkot or Kangra. The fort of Kangra occupied a long narrow strip of land in the fork between the rivers Manjhi and Banganga. Its walls were more than two miles in circuit, but its strength lay in the precipitous cliffs overhanging the two rivers. The only accessible point was on the side of the land towards the town, where the ridge of the rocks separating the two rivers formed a neck of a few hundred feet. The fort was regarded as impregnable. It was generally believed that 'he who holds the fort holds the hills'.⁵

Mahmud of Ghazni is said to have been attracted by the prestige of the fort and its fabulous wealth. Probably the raja of Kangra had supported the Hindu Shahi ruler of Kabul in his battles against Mahmud of Ghazni. In any case, Sultan Mahmud is stated to have entered the fort of Bhimnagar (Kangra) and ordered his chamberlains to take charge of the treasures of gold and silver. He himself took charge of the jewels.⁶ The fort was garrisoned and entrusted to an officer of the sultan. The raja of Kangra was able to recover it in 1048 with the help of the Tomara ruler of Delhi. However, he lost territory in the plains to Sultan Ibrahim of Ghazni around 1070. The state of Kangra now became confined to the hills.

That the raja of Kangra acted as the overlord of Thakurs and Ranas is evident from two inscriptions in the Shiva temple at Baijnath. There are references to two rajas in these inscriptions. Jaya Chandra is called 'the supreme king of Jalandhara'; Hridaya Chandra is called 'king of Trigarta'. The two terms appear to be interchangeable, but it does not necessarily mean that Jaya Chandra was actually ruling over Jalandhar. What is more significant, Jaya Chandra is mentioned as the overlord of the 'Rajanaka' of Kiragrama (Baijnath), the seat of Rana Lakhshmana Chandra. The Rana's ancestors had held the place for eight generations as vassals of the rajas of Jalandhara and Trigarta. Their importance in the late twelfth century may be judged from the fact that the Rana's mother was a daughter of Hridaya Chandra of Trigarta. The evidence of the inscription is extremely significant for the existence of suzerain-vassal polity in Kangra.⁷

The sultans of Delhi appear to have taken interest in the hills in general and the state of Kangra in particular during the fourteenth century. Muhammad bin Tughluq sent an expedition into the hills to bring all the rulers under his political control. This expedition

on the whole is regarded as a failure, but it is generally agreed that the armies of Muhammad bin Tughluq succeeded in occupying Nagarkot (Kangra). This may not be literally accurate, but there is hardly any doubt that Raja Prithi Chand (1330–45) submitted to the Delhi sultan and accepted his overlordship.⁹ The fort of Kangra was besieged by Firoz Tughluq in the reign of Raja Rup Chand (1360–75). According to the *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*, the siege went on for six months and the raja recognized the overlordship of Sultan Firoz Tughluq. Significantly, Firoz Tughluq collected a large number of Sanskrit manuscripts from Jwalamukhi, which suggests that the rulers of Kangra patronized learning.¹⁰ Towards the end of the fourteenth century, Timur was keen to occupy the fort of Kangra, but 'the difficult character of the country prevented him from fully carrying out his design'. He plundered Kangra and his soldiers collected booty, cattle, and prisoners.¹¹

A few years after Timur's invasion, Hari Chand ascended the throne of Kangra. Due to his failure to return from a hunting expedition, he was replaced by his younger brother Karam Chand. Hari Chand founded the principality of Guler with the consent of his brother. This incident shows that a raja once enthroned could not be deprived of his dignity: consecration was irrevokable. Significantly, the rajas of Guler continued to be regarded as representing the senior line. Karam Chand was succeeded by his son Sansar Chand in 1430. An inscription of his reign indicates that he was tributary to the Saiyid Sultan of Delhi.¹²

Several of the hill chiefs, including Raja Dharm Chand of Kangra, appear to have acknowledged the overlordship of Sher Shah in the early 1540s. This could be the reason why Sikandar Shah Sur, a nephew of Sher Shah, retreated into the hills around Kangra when he was defeated by the Mughals at Sirhind. Akbar was leading a campaign against Sikandar even before his installation as the Mughal emperor in 1556. It took him over a year to oblige Sikandar to submit. While some other chiefs were helping Sikandar, Raja Dharm Chand made his submission to Akbar and was received with favour.¹³ In the *Tabaqat-i Akbari* he is mentioned as 'the most renowned of all the Rajas of the hills'.

Raja Jai Chand (1570–85), who incurred Akbar's suspicion, was arrested, and his son Bidhi Chand rose in revolt. The Punjab governor, Khan Jahan Husain Quli Khan, was ordered in 1572 to place Nagarkot in the possession of Raja Birbal. Peace was concluded in 1573, and Todar Mal annexed all the fertile tracts, including sixty-six villages attached to the fort of Kangra, which was still in the hands of Raja Jai Chand. A few years after Jai Chand's death in 1585, Bidhi Chand joined a confederation of hill chiefs in their revolt against Akbar, but submitted to Zain Khan Koka and accompanied him to the imperial court. Bidhi Chand took no part in the rebellion of the hill chiefs in 1594–95.¹⁴

Jahangir sent several expeditions against Kangra till the fort was captured towards the end of 1620. It was to remain under Mughal control till 1783, to serve as the headquarters of a Mughal *faujda*. Jahangir visited Kangra in person in 1622 when prayers were said, the khutba was read, and a cow was slaughtered in his presence. He bowed 'in thanks to the Almighty for this great conquest which no previous monarch had been able to accomplish'. He ordered 'a large mosque to be built in the fortress'. Furthermore, nearly the whole state of Kangra was annexed to the Mughal empire. The district of Rajgir was assigned in jagir for the maintenance of Raja Hari Chand and the royal family.¹⁵

Resistance to the Mughals was kept up by Chandra Bhan Chand, a descendant of the younger brother of Raja Dharam Chand, and probably the next in succession to the *gaddi* after Hari Chand. His defiance became the subject of popular lore in Kangra. His son Vijai Ram Chand probably added the talukas (ta'alluqas) of Nadaun, Palam, Mahal Sarai, Jaisukh, and Malhar to the district of Rajgir. His successors followed a submissive policy, seeking

sometimes to gain favour with the emperor by attendance at the court, or remaining active in support of the Mughal faujdars of Kangra. During a long reign of forty-seven years in the early eighteenth century, Hamir Chand built a small fort near the present town of Hamirpur, and his successor Abhay Chand built a fort called Abhayamanpur, also known as Tira, on the hill above Sujanpur. This may be taken as the sign of Kangra's gradual recovery from the setback suffered in the reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan.¹⁶

Kangra regained much of its past glory during the second half of the eighteenth century. In 1752 the Punjab was conquered by Ahmad Shah Abdali. Before he could establish a firm control over the hills, Ghamand Chand recovered all the territory that had been wrested from his ancestors by the Mughals, with the exception of the Kangra fort. He was astute enough to cultivate Ahmad Shah Abdali who appointed him to the governorship of the Jalandhar Doab in 1758. His good relations with Ahmad Shah Abdali enabled him indirectly to annex the northern half of Kulehr and the taluka of Palam. He strengthened the fort of Pathiyar. Tira-Sujanpur was founded by him and embellished with many fine buildings. Kangra was well on its way to recovering its former glory.¹⁷

Raja Sansar Chand's ambition was to capture the Kangra fort, to establish his overlordship in the hills, and to expand his dominions towards the plains. For occupying the fort of Kangra he sought help from the Sikh ruler Jai Singh Kanhiya. The Mughal faujdar Saif Ali Khan surrendered the fort in 1783, but it was occupied by Jai Singh. Sansar Chand made several attempts to capture it. A compromise was made at last in 1786 when Jai Singh surrendered not only the fort but also his supremacy over the hill states in exchange for the territory that had been conquered by Sansar Chand in the plains.¹⁸

With the fort in his possession, Sansar Chand made many of the hill chiefs tributary to himself, compelled them to attend his court, and send contingents for his military expeditions. The Chamba chief was asked to make over Rihlu, and his refusal resulted in a battle in which the Chamba chief was killed. Mandi was subdued, its capital was sacked, and its young ruler was imprisoned at Nadaun. Three of his districts were seized, one of which was given to Suket and another to Kulu. Sansar Chand annexed the southern half of Kulehr so that its raja was entirely dispossessed. Sansar Chand's design of expansion in the plains was defeated by Maharaja Ranjit Singh who was rapidly rising to power. The raja of Bilaspur invited the Gurkhas to invade Kangra, promising aid with contingents. The Gurkhas advanced into the country and, on reaching Nadaun, liberated the raja of Mandi. Sansar Chand took refuge in the Kangra fort. After a siege of four years, he approached Maharaja Ranjit Singh to offer the fort as the price of his help. Ranjit Singh placed his own garrison in the fort and annexed the sixty-six villages that had been attached to it since Mughal times. Nearly all the hill states acknowledged his overlordship. Sansar Chand retired to Tira-Sujanpur. Once a year, however, he had to go to Lahore to pay respects to his suzerain.¹⁹

II

The territory of Kangra in the reign of Sansar Chand was about 40 kos in length from north to south, and 15 to 40 kos in breadth from east to west. It was surrounded in the hills by Chamba, Bilaspur, Kulu, Mandi, Suket, Jaswan, Siba, and Guler. The entire territory was divided into three provinces. Each province was divided into talukas, *tappas*, and villages. There were over a dozen talukas in Kangra proper, all bearing distinctive names, and their boundaries usually following the natural variations of the country. With very few exceptions,

the talukas had survived unchanged from the earliest times and 'acquired a deep hold upon the feelings and prejudices of the people'.²⁰

Each taluka was divided into circuits, primarily for fiscal management. The local terms used for this unit were *tappa*, *hakimi*, or *maqda*. These units were created on the consideration that a single person may efficiently supervise each unit with the assistance of a set of officials. The size of the circuit varied according to the nature of the country; it covered extensive area in the hilly tracts and a small area in the open and well-cultivated valleys. Each circuit consisted of a number of hamlets. Each hamlet had its separate boundaries, which were jealously watched and maintained. A large group of hamlets was called *graon* or *gaon*.²¹

The taluka in earlier times was known as *kotwali* because of its chief officer, the *kotwal*. He dealt with fiscal, criminal, and military matters. In an emergency he was required to lead the fighting men of his taluka to the scene of danger. When the people wanted to represent their case to the *raja*, they approached the *kotwal* as their spokesman who also acted as the umpire and arbitrator in all their disputes. The people of the taluka generally followed him in a political crisis. He was remunerated by revenue-free land. Called by various names, like *kardar*, *hakim*, and *palsara*, he was assisted by an accountant called *kait* or *likhneara*. An officer called *kotiala* was the keeper of the granary. Then there were constables, messengers, and forest watchers. The headman of the *tappa* continued to serve the government despite political changes. He had to keep the accounts, collect revenues, and look after the agricultural interest of his charge. He generally belonged to an influential family that for generations had managed the affairs of the *tappa*. He was entitled to collect from 4 to 6 per cent over the government revenues. Each hamlet or village had its own headman, known as the *muqaddam*. Each village had a watchman (*chaukidar*), styled locally as *batwal* or *karunk*.²²

The Mughals raised *qanungos* and *chaudharis* in those districts that were included in the imperial *demesne*. The former looked after the revenues of the taluka and dealt with matters related to land. The jurisdiction of a *chaudhari* extended over eight or ten villages. Thus, there were several *chaudharis* in every taluka. Their duties were chiefly fiscal. They were expected to encourage cultivation, replace absconding cultivators, and provide for the security of revenues. They were entrusted also with some police power, being responsible for the prevention of crime and the arrest of criminals. They were remunerated by small *jagirs*, besides 2 per cent of the gross produce.²³

The *raja* was the supreme head of the state. He exercised religious, feudal, and personal authority. He was the head of state religion. He could order excommunication from a caste and direct the restoration of an excommunicated person to the brotherhood, prescribing penances in consultation with Brahmins; some of the rites of readmission were performed in his presence. In the *vanshavali* of Basohli, the ruler protects his subjects 'like his own children'; he makes Brahmins, Rajputs, and Vaishyas persevere in their prayers; he himself performs *puja* regularly and acts according to his *dharma* as a sacred duty. 'The four castes took their food in the *chawka*. When the women came out of their homes and happened to meet a man, they at once turned their back on him'. In this idealized depiction of the ruler, his paternal care for the subjects, concern for the proper performance of sacred and other duties of the *varnashramadharma*, his anxiety to preserve the status quo in the social order, and his consideration for the honour of women get emphasized.²⁴ The hill chiefs, in the words of Lepel Griffin:

struck their roots deep as trees grow in the rain and the soft air; they have, as it were, become one with nature, a part of the divine and established order of things, and the simple Rajput peasant no

more questions their right to rule than he rebels against the sunshine which ripens his harvest or the storm which blasts it.²⁵

Hutchison and Vogel express their appreciation for the antiquity of the hill chiefs in equally glowing terms:

The ancestors of many of them were ruling over settled states when ours were little better than savages, and the youngest of them can point to the pedigree dating back for a thousand years. In comparison with them most of the royal houses of the plains are but as of yesterday, and the oldest must yield the palm to some of the noble families of the Panjab Hills.²⁶

According to J.B. Lyall, the raja of Kangra was not a feudal king or lord paramount over inferior lords of manors, but rather the manorial lord over the whole country. Lyall's statement may be taken as a measure of the extent to which the Thakurs and Ranas had been subjugated. Lyall goes on to observe that, unlike the *mauzas* of the plains, the circuits in Kangra were not estates but mere groupings of holdings under one collector of rents. The rent due from each field was payable direct to the raja, unless he remitted it as an act of favour to the holder, or assigned it in jagir to a third party in lieu of pay or as a subsistence allowance. Similarly, the grazing fees due from the owner of each head or flock were payable to the raja, and these were rarely or never assigned to any jagirdar. Thus, each interest in land, whether the right to cultivate certain fields, graze exclusively certain plots of waste, work a watermill, set a net to catch a game or hoax on a mountain, or put a fish wier in a stream, was held directly from the raja as a separate holding or tenancy. The incumbent's interest in each case was by way of inheritance (*warisi*) and not one of proprietorship (*maliki*).²⁷

No new field could be formed out of the waste without a grant (*patta*) from the raja. No wazir or any other official or jagirdar was allowed to give permission to reclaim waste. Certain rights in the waste around the fields and houses in villages were enjoyed by all the rural inhabitants alike, non-agriculturists as well as regular landholders. These rights were subject to the raja's right to reclaim. It is significant that artisans and other non-agriculturist residents in villages held their plots from the raja, and not from their village employers and customers. They paid cesses to the raja and were bound to do service only to him, like the regular landholders who were liable to be pressed into military or menial service. In short, all rights were supposed to come from the raja.²⁸

The estates of landholders consisted of holdings of cultivated fields only, and not of shares of the wasteland within the boundaries of a circuit. All unenclosed waste, small or great, was the property of the state, and the rights of the landholders were of the nature of rights of use alone. The rights of use in the waste were called *bartan*. The most universal was the right to pasture cattle or sheep and goats, to cut grass or leaves of certain trees for fodder, to cut thorns for hedges, and to break off or pick up dry wood. Not only regular landholders but also other residents in the villages, such as traders, shopkeepers, artisans, and carriers, grazed their cattle and sheep and goats in the wastelands nearest their houses. The state collected a grazing tax from which no class was exempted. It was levied everywhere on buffaloes and in almost all places on sheep and goats. Professional shepherds and herdsmen were taxed at higher rates than the others. Cows and oxen were exempted on the grounds of religious merit (*gai ka pun*). Certain blocks of forests within villages were reserved as hunting preserves (*rakhs*) of the raja. Grazing even in the unreserved forest was prohibited for three months of the rainy season. The system of tenures in the Kangra hills came down practically unchanged to the time of British rule.²⁹

The warisi holdings in the hills did not have much value compared to the maliki estates in the plains. The holdings were small, and the revenue demand was heavy. A man who tilled his lands with his own hands could earn a humble subsistence, but if he employed servants or gave land to a tenant, the profit was very small. A few traders and village officials eked out their living by farming a little land in this way, but the upper classes as a rule held rent-free lands.³⁰

The chief holders of rent-free lands were the descendants of cadets of the royal family, known as Jaikari Rajputs. The rajas alienated the rents of a great deal of land to these families. The Rajputs generally held two kinds of grants: a free grant in perpetuity near their homes known as *basi jagir*, and other grants in lieu of military or civil service, varying in size according to their grade or favour at court. The rajas granted lands to Brahman and temples by way of *dharmarth*. The grantees and jagirdars assumed the position of landlords towards the cultivators. And since the raja rarely interfered on their behalf, the cultivators were degraded into mere tenants-at-will. Only the cultivators who came of well-born and numerous families were strong enough to hold their own.³¹

Peculiar to the hills was *lahri basi*. All houses were more or less detached, and almost all had a small patch of land within their enclosures, called the *lahri*. The whole site of the house and the garden was called *lahri basi*. These little gardens did not exceed a few yards in area as a rule. But sometimes in the case of poor Rajputs or Brahmans, or in the case of mahajans and respectable merchants or shopkeepers, the *lahri* was considerably larger, and was rather a *basi* grant than a true *lahri*. There was another class of *lahris* held from the individual landholder when he gave a corner of a field, or a bit of his own house enclosure, as *basi lahari* to a tenant in the hope of getting his fields cultivated on a more or less permanent basis. The *lahri* basis were thus of two kinds: held by men of respectability as a favour, and held by artisans or labouring families for performing some occasional service.³²

III

The total population of Kangra towards the end of the eighteenth century was probably not much more than 300,000. The highest class of people were Brahmans. Some of them were sufficiently acquainted with Sanskrit to read the texts for certain ceremonies, but few were entitled to rank as pandits. The majority of them knew only the language of the hills. The purest among them performed religious duties and abstained from agriculture. However, most of them held lands, lent money, engaged in service, discharged village offices, and entered any secular pursuit that promised subsistence. Unlike the Brahmans in the plains, the hill Brahmans used to eat meat. They were held in greater reverence than the Brahmans in the plains. All classes from the king to the peasant saluted the Brahman with 'I fall at your feet' ('*pair paunda*') or 'I touch my forehead in submission' ('*matha tekte*'). The pujaris of the great temples at Kangra and Jwalamukhi claimed to be Saraswat Brahmans, but the other Brahmans did not eat *kachchi roti* with them. Even the term used for these hereditary priests of the temple was peculiar: they were called *bhojkis*.³³

Next to the Brahmans in social status were the Rajputs, consisting of the clans associated with the ruling houses and the families whom they chose to marry. They were entitled to receive the peculiar salutation of 'hail the king' (*jai dia*), derived from the words *jai* (victory) and *dev* (king). It was not offered to any other caste. The Rajputs were expected never to drive the plough or give their daughters in marriage to inferiors. Their dwellings were generally placed in isolated positions, either on the top of a hill or on the verge of a

forest. Where natural defences did not exist, an artificial growth was promoted to afford privacy. About fifty paces from the house, a vestibule (*mandi*) was built to receive outsiders. No one unconnected with the household could go beyond the vestibule. Many Rajputs had taken to prohibited practices and lost their caste status, but many more clung to the norms in the face of adversity. Apart from the Katoch clan of Kangra with its four grand divisions and numerous denominations, the descendants of the ancient petty chiefs, known as Ranas, were included in the Rajput caste. The principal families of Ranas in the Kangra region belonged to Chari, Giro, Kanhiari, Pathiyar, Habrol, Sumbar, and Dadwal. Some other clans or branches of clans occupied a high rank because they observed most of the Rajput customs even after taking to agriculture.³⁴

Far larger in number than the Rajputs and Brahmans were the Rathis of Kangra who lived in hilly tracts. They were apparently an admixture of the Rajput and the Shudra, but they were neither Rajput nor Shudra. The offspring of a Rajput father and a Shudra mother were accepted as Rathis by the brotherhood. The subdivisions of the Rathis were almost as numerous as the villages. The higher subdivisions among them were generally styled Thakurs. They did not like to be called Rathis, but they did not claim to be pure Rajputs. On the death of an elder brother, the widow lived with the next brother. She could select a new husband, but in that case his former household was entitled to recover her value from the new husband. The Rathis were not unacquainted with the use of arms, but they were essentially agriculturists.³⁵

The Ghiraths lived in the valleys, being predominant in the valleys of Kangra, Palam, and Rihlu. Their fertile lands yielded double crops, and they remained employed during the whole year in the various processes of agriculture. They were ranked as Shudras, and their men were impressed for forced labour (*begar*). Their women carried wood, vegetables, mangoes, milk, and other products to the local market for sale. Both men and women were addicted to liquor. They took money for their daughters, but seldom exchanged them. A widow was expected to marry her husband's brother who was entitled to her restitution if she left him.³⁶

Among the trading communities, the Khattris were numerically the most important. They wore the sacred thread. Much of the petty trade was in their hands. Next to them were Kaits who too wore the sacred thread and were ranked with Mahajans. Bracketed with them as Vaishyas were Suds and Karars. For matrimonial alliances, they all formed rather tangled groups among themselves. The Gaddis lived exclusively on the snowy range that divides Kangra from Chamba. As a generic name they included Brahmans, Khattris, Rajputs, and Rathis, but the greater part of their wealth consisted of flocks of sheep and goats. During the winter months they moved into the valley of Kangra and during the summer months into the territory of Chamba. They wore the sacred thread and were stricter in observing Brahmanical customs than most of the inhabitants of the higher Himalayas. They were fond of singing and dancing. Their natural hilarity was considerably enhanced by the use of liquor.³⁷

The Gujars were largely Muslim and they subsisted exclusively by the sale of milk, ghee, and other produce of their herds. During the hot weather they drove their buffaloes to the upper ranges. Ordinarily, they lived near forests, particularly around Jwalamukhi, Tira, and Nadaun. While the men grazed the cattle, tending them in the woods for weeks together, the women went to the local market every morning with baskets containing earthen pots filled with milk, buttermilk, and ghee.³⁸

A mixed class known as Koli, Dagi, or Chanal was found throughout the hills, but their occupation was not confined to the performance of the usual services demanded of

outcastes; they followed the occupations of many of the artisans and higher menial castes. Almost all menial castes in the hills occupied themselves very largely in field labour. They were always the first to be impressed for begar. Their houses were never to exceed a certain size, nor to be raised above one floor. The men were forbidden to wear long hair. In their marriages the brides were forced to go on foot. Musical instruments like the drum and the trumpet were positively prohibited. Their depression in the society was quite marked. Even an accidental touch of their persons carried defilement, obliging the other person to bathe in order to regain purity.³⁹

The Barwalas were commonly found in the lower hills of Kangra, serving as village watchmen or messengers. They were also the *coolies* of the hills, like the *chamars* of the plains. But they did not work in leather. They were called *satbahak* or 'bearer of burden'. They were also known as Karunks, when their duty was to assemble coolies and others for begar. They were often employed as ploughmen and field labourers by the Rajputs and other landholders who did not touch the plough. They attended upon village guests, filled pipes, bore torches, and carried the bridegroom's palanquin at the weddings. For their services they received fixed fees. Like all outcastes, they lived on the outskirts of the village and were regarded as almost the lowest stratum of the social order. The Barwalas were almost entirely Muslim. Their counterpart in the high ranges of Kangra were the Batwals who were almost all Hindu. Very close to them both were the Dumna, the *churah* of the hills. They worked in bamboo and made sieves, winnowing pans, fans, matting, and other articles ordinarily made of bamboo. Being outcaste, they were not allowed to draw water from wells used by the caste Hindus.⁴⁰

The staple food of Kangra was maize and wheat. In the rice-growing valleys the people subsisted largely on rice. In the poor uplands coarse millet formed part of their diet. The ordinary clothing of a man of the poorer classes consisted of a cap, a frock reaching to the waist or a similar but longer garment called *cholu* which reached to the knees, and short breeches. The hill people were fond of coloured vests and scarves. They were also fond of wearing earrings of gold, graced sometimes with pearls. Those who could afford it, displayed gold or silver bracelets, and necklaces of alternate beads and gold. The dress of women consisted of a petticoat, a *choli* and long trousers, with a *dupatta* or mantle to form the headdress. With the exception of unmarried girls and widows, women displayed nose-rings, which in fact was a sign of married life.⁴¹

The people of Kangra were fond of fairs and public assemblies. All women, except the Rajput, attended the local fairs. At wedding feasts and other similar events men of all castes, from the Brahman to the Shudra, ate together sitting in one line arranged strictly according to social rank. They did not set out on any expedition or undertake any duty without consulting a Brahman. They believed in lucky and unlucky months and days. At weddings, funerals, festivals, harvest times, ploughing time, and on all other sorts of occasion, they sacrificed goats. All misfortunes and sickness were attributed to the malice of some demon, spirit, or deceased saint. Belief in witches and magic was universal.⁴²

The practice of female infanticide was prevalent among the upper caste. Child marriage was customary among all classes of people. There were four kinds of betrothal contracts among the lower classes. One of these was a simple exchange. Another was to bind the bridegroom to work for the bride's family for several years. The third was to make cash payment for the bride. In the fourth category no payment or exchange of any kind was made. But this was rather rare among the lower classes. Polygamy was allowed and was practised more or less by all the tribes. The eldest son received a larger share in property than that of the other sons. In case of inheritance by sons from more than one wife, the

chundavand was followed: the inheritance was first divided among mothers and then it passed on to their sons. Among some of the Rana families property was inherited by the eldest son. Widow remarriage was forbidden among those castes that practised seclusion of women and did not work in the fields. The son of a *rakhaor*, or kept woman, as opposed to a *biatar*, or married woman, was regarded as illegitimate and did not inherit any property. However, among the people who married widows and allowed their women to work in their fields; the son of any kept woman shared equally with the son by a wife married in a formal manner. If a man took a widow as his wife when she was pregnant, the child born was regarded as his child. There was a general agreement that a man could adopt a son out of his own clan or *gotar*.⁴³

With regard to a widow's right to inherit, the Rajputs, Brahmans, Khatris, and Mahajans believed that she could inherit for life on condition of chastity. The Kanets did not insist on this condition so long as the widow continued to reside in her late husband's house. This was the custom among the Ghiraths and other similar castes in Kangra, but they did not admit it openly. With regard to daughters, all classes agreed that an orphan daughter had an interest similar to that of a widow so long as she remained unmarried. However, a daughter or her children could never succeed to landed estate by simple inheritance in preference to even remote kinsmen.⁴⁴

The whole principality of Kangra was covered with a network of shrines, ranging from the temple of Gauri Shankar built and endowed by Maharaja Sansar Chand to the rudely hewn figure of the devta under the shade of a roadside *pipal* tree. The most famous temple in the district was the one at Kangra, which was dedicated to the Goddess. At the temple of Jwalamukhi, a large number of sheep and goats were sacrificed. The number of local deities was very large. At the founding of the Kangra temple 360 of them were assembled. Among the minor places of worship, there were some graves of Muslim saints who were venerated by Hindus as well as Muslims. There were a number of *tiraths* in Kangra and some of them were supposed to be of equal efficacy to Hardwar, especially the *sangam* of Banganga and Gupatganga close to the Kangra fort. Most of the temples were dedicated to Shiva. The followers of Vishnu were also said to be numerous. There was a Jain temple within the Kangra fort that was visited by pilgrims during the earlier centuries. An important religious order was that of the Gosains. The number of jogis and sanyasis was also quite considerable in Kangra. Almost every house possessed its own Sidh or Nag, a deity which was supposed to repel witches and to bring fortunes.⁴⁵

The Jalandhara *pitha*, which corresponded to the present district of Kangra, was regarded as the foremost among the sixty-four Shakta pithas. It was dotted with shrines dedicated to various goddesses. In a nineteenth-century work on the Jalandhara pitha, nearly equal number of *stotras* are devoted to Shaiva and Shakta systems, nine for the former and eight for the latter. There is one stotra that is Vaishnav and another that significantly relates to the river Beas. A few hymns in the *Rigveda* are addressed to Vipasha (Beas). It is interesting, therefore, to note that the importance of the river Beas is underlined in the *Jalandhara Pitha Deepika*.⁴⁶

Vaishnava themes began to be treated by the Kangra painters under state patronage in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The most popular text for the choice of these themes was the *Bhagavata Purana*. An early eighteenth-century painting shows a forest fire raised by the god Agni being swallowed. In another early eighteenth-century painting Krishna is stealing the clothes of cowherdesses (*gopis*). Yet another one of the same period shows Krishna lifting the mountain Govardhana to protect his people from the wrath of Indra who had sent heavy rain to submerge Braj under its torrent. A painting of the second

quarter of the eighteenth century illustrates Krishna serenading Radha. A late eighteenth-century painting shows Krishna bringing the *parijata* tree from Indra's heaven (Indraloka). It is interesting to note that Krishna is demonstrating his superiority over the two chief gods of the *Rigveda*. Towards the end of his reign Maharaja Sansar Chand spent the early part of the day in the ceremonies of his religion, while the evening was devoted to singing and dancing. The performers recited songs relating to Krishna. The raja was fond of drawing and had many artists in his employ; he had a large collection of pictures, mostly representing the exploits of Krishna and Balaram, the adventures of Arjuna, and other subjects from the *Mahabharata*.⁴⁷

IV

The Chamba state in the nineteenth century was bound by Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh, Bara Bangahal, and Kangra. The greatest length of the state was about 70 miles and the greatest breadth about 50 miles. It covered parts of three river valleys: the Chenab, the Ravi, and the Beas. The Pangi range or Pir Panjal separated the Chenab from the Ravi, and the Dhaula Dhar separated the Ravi from the Beas.

At the time of its foundation in the mid-sixth century, the state, with its capital at Brahmapura (Brahmaur), was very small. The first expansion took place under Meru Varman in the late seventh century. An inscription, which refers to a feudatory (*samanta*) of Meru Varman, indicates that the state extended down the Ravi valley almost as far as the present site of Chamba. Meru Varman asserted his supremacy over Kulu, which remained under the influence of his successors for over a century. The next landmark in the history of Chamba was the reign of Sahila Varman who extended the territories of the state and shifted its capital to Chamba in the early tenth century.

Early in the eleventh century Chamba came under the influence of Ananta Deva of Kashmir. Salavahana Varman was actually deposed and Soma Varman was placed on the gaddi. Chamba remained subordinate to Kashmir in the eleventh century. Ashta Varman's sister was married to Kalsa of Kashmir. In the early twelfth century the raja of Chamba seems to have taken advantage of internal dissensions in Kashmir to assert his independence. Around 1160, Raja Lalita Varman of Chamba gave the title of 'Rajanaka' to Rana Naga Pala. Another Rana, Ludar Pal of Salhi, is mentioned in an inscription of 1170. Raja Vijaya Varman, who ruled from Chamba in the last quarter of the twelfth century, is said to have invaded Kashmir and Ladakh. The state boundaries were enlarged during his reign.⁴⁸

Chamba appears to have enjoyed complete independence for more than 400 years before the long reign of Ganesh Varman in the sixteenth century. He built the fort of Ganeshgarh to protect his frontier and to consolidate his power to the south of the Dhaula Dhar. His son Partap Singh Varman defeated the forces of Kangra in a battle in which the younger brother of the Kangra raja was killed. He annexed the districts of Chari and Gharoh to Chamba. Before long, however, Chamba was compelled to surrender these two districts and Rihlu to Akbar. From this time onwards Chamba remained tributary to the Mughals for about 200 years.⁴⁹

More than forty copperplates of Balabhadra's reign are known to be extant. He was so lavish in bestowing land and other gifts upon Brahmans that the officials of the state persuaded his son Janardan to remove his father from power. A copperplate of 1613 speaks of Balabhadra as 'Raja' and of Janaradan as 'Maharaja Kumara' or 'Maharajaputra'. The son was ruling in the name of the father. In the *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri* Janardan is mentioned as the

greatest zamindar of the hills. Despite Jahangir's favourable view of Janardan, Jagat Singh of Nurpur persisted in his aggression against Chamba. Janardan's brother Bishambar was defeated in a battle, and Jagat Singh was able to occupy Chamba. Janardan was treacherously killed by Jagat Singh himself. He ruled the state through his officials for twenty years.⁵⁰

Prithvi Singh, grandson of Balabhadra, was able to recover Chamba in 1641. While Jagat Singh was in rebellion against Shah Jahan, Prithvi Singh offered his services to the emperor to be honoured with a khilat and the title of raja; he was given the mansab of 1000 *zat* and 400 *sawar*. After the conclusion of the war with Jagat Singh, Prithvi Singh removed the Rana of Pangri and built a kothi in Pangri. He claimed the pargana of Bhalai in Churah from the chief of Basohli. Their dispute was finally settled by a Mughal officer in 1648 in favour of Chamba. Prithvi Singh's loyalty to the Mughal emperor brought him many favours, including a jagir worth Rs 16,000 a year in Jaswan. The family idol of the Chamba rajas, called Raghubir, is said to have been obtained by Prithvi Singh on one of his visits to Shah Jahan in Delhi. Perhaps in honour of Prithvi Singh, all his successors adopted the epithet Singh in their names and dropped the old suffix of Varman.⁵¹

Raja Sangram Pal of Basohli appears to have disregarded the arbitration of 1648 in the reign of Chatar Singh who re-annexed Bhalai. This annexation was accepted by the Mughal governor of Lahore. Chatar Singh carried his arms beyond Pangri into Padar, which was still in the possession of Ranas who were probably subject to Chamba. He removed the Ranas and appointed his own officials, founding a town named Chatargarh. When Aurangzeb issued an order for the demolition of all temples in the state in 1669, Chatar Singh directed that a gilded pinnacle should be put on all the chief temples in Chamba. For this defiance he was summoned to Delhi. He sent his brother Shakat Singh. But he turned back before reaching Delhi. Chatar Singh joined a confederation of the hill chiefs against the Mughal governor of Lahore. Perhaps he was able in this situation to recover some of the territory lost earlier. It was probably during Chatar Singh's reign that Lahul was finally divided between Chamba and Kulu.⁵²

Udai Singh, who succeeded Chatar Singh in 1690, received a mansab of 1,000 *zat* and 600 *sawar* from Aurangzeb. His first important act was to protect Dalip Singh, the minor chief of Guler, against the rajas of Jammu, Bhadu, and Basohli, with the support of the chiefs of Siba, Kahlur, and Mandi. When Udai Singh appointed a barber to the office of wazir because he had fallen in love with the barber's daughter, the officials of the state decided to appoint Ugar Singh, a cousin of the raja, as regent. Ugar Singh fled to Jammu, and the officials conspired to put Lakshman Singh, the raja's younger brother, on the gaddi. Lakshman Singh eventually sided with his brother and both of them were killed. Ugar Singh appeared in Chamba with the assistance of Raja Dhruv Dev of Jammu and was installed as raja. He was said to be disloyal to the Mughal emperor. Therefore, the ilaqa of Jhund with its seventeen castles was taken away from Chamba and given to Raja Medini Pal of Basohli. The jagir in Jaswan was resumed in the reign of Ugar Singh, presumably due to his disloyalty. He was popular at first, but gradually the officials were alienated from him and they decided to depose him. Ugar Singh fled to Kangra and Dalel Singh was installed as raja in 1735.⁵³

Dalel Singh tried to make himself popular by remitting various taxes. In 1744, he received the ilaqa of Pathiyar near Palampur in jagir worth Rs 9,500 a year. Obviously, he had good relations with the Mughal governor of Lahore. The chief of Kangra tried to seize the pargana, but the Mughal authorities consistently supported Raja Dalel Singh. A few years later Umed Singh, son of Ugar Singh, arrived in Chamba with the assistance of the raja of Jasrota, his father-in-law, and the chief of Basohli. Dalel Singh surrendered the state

to him and became a sadhu. Ascending the gaddi in 1748, Umed Singh reasserted his sway to the south of Dhaulā Dhar. The ilāqa of Jundh, which was earlier given to Basohli, was restored to Chamba in 1758. A year later the pargana of Pathiyar was also restored to him. Presumably, the chief of Kangra intervened on behalf of the Rana of Pathiyar to take away the pargana from Chamba. However, Ahmad Shah Abdali and his governors consistently supported Raja Umed Singh and he was able to hold Pathiyar. Before his death in 1764, the Chamba territory to the south of the Dhaulā Dhar was restored to its ancient limits.⁵⁴

Umed Singh was succeeded by his minor son Raj Singh. Taking advantage of his minority, Raja Ghamand Chand of Kangra seized the fort of Pathiyar and drove the Chamba troops out of Bir-Bangahal. Raj Singh's mother, who was a Jammu princess, obtained help from Raja Ranjit Dev of Jammu and recovered the lost territory. Ranjit Dev began to interfere in the affairs of Chamba, appointing one of his own officials named Aklu to the office of wazir. When Raj Singh came of age, he had Aklu thrown into prison. Ranjit Dev sent an army under Raja Amrit Pal of Basohli to invade Chamba. He succeeded in occupying the capital. Raj Singh sought assistance from the Ramgarhia sardars, paying a lakh of rupees. With their help, he drove out the Jammu army in 1775. Probably Chamba had accepted the suzerainty of the Ramgarhias in 1770 and that was the reason why Raj Singh could seek support from them against Jammu. On the defeat of the Ramgarhias at the hands of Jai Singh Kanhiya in 1776, Chamba became tributary to Jai Singh.⁵⁵

Raj Singh appears to have offered his services to Timur Shah in 1777, inviting him to visit the country. He entered into an agreement with Sansar Chand and a few other chiefs in 1778 to attack Kulu, seize Bangahal, and divide it equally among them. In 1779, Raja Pritam Singh of Kulu requested Raj Singh to restore Bangahal to Kulu and to release his wazir Bhag Chand who had been seized and taken to Chamba. Raj Singh granted Kishtwar to Sukhdev Singh on the condition of loyalty to Chamba as a subordinate chief, and made the chief of Bhadarwah subordinate to himself. In 1783 the rani of Bilaspur approached Raj Singh for help and protection for her infant son, presumably in her war with Kangra. In the summer of 1786 Raj Singh entered into agreement with the chiefs of Mandi and Kahlur to invade and conquer Kulu and to divide the territory equally among them.⁵⁶

By this time Sansar Chand had occupied the fort of Kangra and was ready to pursue his ambitious design of bringing all the eastern states under his supreme authority. In 1794, he demanded the surrender of Rihlu from Raj Singh who began to prepare for war. Sansar Chand sought help from Dhian Singh, the wazir of Guler, who had founded the state of Kotla. Raj Singh received help from the raja of Nurpur. Sansar Chand made a surprise attack and Raj Singh was wounded and fell dead at Nerti. He was succeeded by Jit Singh who erected a temple on the spot where Raj Singh had died. A *mela* began to be held there every year on the anniversary of his death. Jit Singh continued to maintain his hold on Rihlu. Early in 1797 Shah Zaman asked him to perform the services of *diwani* in conjunction with Raja Sampuran Dev of Jammu. Shortly afterwards, Jit Singh was involved in a war with Basohli. He conquered the state, but restored it on payment of war indemnity. Bhup Chand of Bhadarwah promised to remain a faithful tributary to Raja Jit Singh. In 1801 Raja Tegh Singh of Kishtwar promised allegiance to Chamba. Raja Pritam Singh of Kulu promised assistance to Jit Singh for attacking Kangra. A number of states were aligned against Kangra in 1802. Raja Jit Singh aligned himself with Jammu against Kangra. Sometime between 1806 and 1809, Amar Singh Thapa and Ranjit Singh encouraged Raja Jit Singh not to be afraid of Kangra. They also asked him to mobilize his troops, and to send Rs 4,000.⁵⁷

The troops of Chamba under Wazir Nathu assisted the Gurkhas against Sansar Chand. The long siege of the fort of Kangra was going on when Jit Singh died in 1808 to be

succeeded by his minor son Charhat Singh. The administration of Chamba was in the hands of the queen mother, a Jammu princess. Nathu appears to have been a man of great ability and administrative talent. He succeeded in persuading Ranjit Singh not to invade Chamba, but only at the cost of making Chamba tributary to the maharaja.⁵⁸

V

The inscriptions of the tenth and eleventh centuries refer to a number of officials in Chamba. Hutchison and Vogel suggest that all of these officials were actually not present in Chamba though they were there in contemporary India, and probably in neighbouring Kashmir.⁵⁹ There is hardly any doubt, however, that there were at least five principal officials of the state at the capital: wazir, *thare da mahta*, bakhshi, *thare da kotwal*, and *hazre da kotwal*. The wazir could be regarded as the chief minister. He also settled important cases in the town. The *thare da mahta* was the chief financial officer. The bakhshi used to keep the military accounts and was responsible for the internal administration of the state's forces. The *thare da kotwal* performed miscellaneous duties and disposed of petty cases occurring in the town. The *hazre da kotwal* remained in attendance on the raja to carry out his orders. All cases of a special or serious nature went to the raja's court.⁶⁰

For administrative purposes the Chamba state was divided into five divisions, known as a wazarat, each forming a sub-region marked by differences of climate, people, and products. The central wazarat containing the capital was known as Chamba or Sadr Wazarat. The other four wazarats were: Churah to the north and north-west of Chamba, bordering with Basohli and Bhadarwah; Pangti, consisting of a portion of Lahul, with distinct geographical features; Brahmaur, to the south and south-east of Chamba; and Bhattiyat, to the south and south-west of the Dhaula Dhar, adjoining Kangra. Each of the five wazarats was under a wazir who was non-resident and had the title only when on duty in his wazarat.⁶¹

Each wazarat was divided into a number of small administrative districts known as mandala in the early centuries and as pargana in the later period. The term *ilaqa* as a synonym of pargana came into currency still later. There was a popular belief that Chamba used to have eighty-four parganas. Even in 1846–47, when Chamba came under British control, there were seventy-two parganas. Each pargana had clearly defined boundaries, fixed in most cases according to the natural landmarks of the country. Each pargana was subdivided into several small circuits, which were known by different names in different parts of the state: *durbiyali* in Brahmaur, *muqaddami* in Bhattiyat and Pangti, *jhutiyari* in Chamba and Churah. Each circuit contained a varying number of villages. The underlying idea was to demarcate an area of a size that could be efficiently supervised by one official with an adequate staff of assistants. This official was called *durbiyal* in Brahmaur, *muqaddam* in Bhattiyat and Pangti, and *jhutiyar* in Chamba and Churah.⁶²

Each pargana had a state kothi that served as the headquarters and the place of residence of the pargana officials on duty. Most of the older kothis consisted of a large square, measuring 20 or 30 metres on each side, with an open courtyard in the centre. The building was generally two-or-three storeyed, divided into rooms and open verandas. Some of these kothis dated from the time of the Ranas. The work of each pargana was carried on by a *char*, a *likhneara*, and a *batwal*. They were collectively called *kardars* or *kamdars*. The *char* and *batwal* were the two most ancient officials. The former was the chief pargana official and quite powerful. The other office bearers in the pargana were subordinate to him. Besides the *batwal* and the *likhneara*, there were the *jhutiyar*, *ugrahika*, *jinsali*, *pahri*, *bhand*,

hali, *kagadaru*, *lakarhar*, *ghiyaru*, and *dudhyaru*. These officers covered a range of duties: assistance to the char, looking after the magazine of the pargana, guarding the state records and revenues, cooking food, carrying letters, supplying firewood, and collecting ghee and milk. There were slight variations in the names and functions of these office-bearers from wazarat to wazarat. They allowed to collect certain emoluments, called *rakm*, over the revenue demand, which formed a separate charge of cash and kind on the malguzar. Because of the scarcity of artisans like blacksmiths and potters, such workmen were granted land in some parganas so that their services could be used without further payment.⁶³

The estimated gross revenue of the state in the late nineteenth century was about Rs 4.5 lakh. Less than half of it came from land. The revenue was realized both in cash and kind in two instalments. All kinds of grain were accepted, especially barley, millet and maize. Ghee was also collected in two instalments. The grain required for the use of the state was taken to the capital and the surplus was sold at the kothis. The largest amount of land revenue came from the Bhattiyat, followed closely by Churah, close to half a lakh in each case. Chamba lagged behind by more than Rs 10,000 a year. Pangi yielded less than Rs 60,000. Brahmaur and Pangi together contributed less than one-third of what came from Bhattiyat or Churah. It may be added that Bhattiyat had ten parganas, Churah had fifteen, Chamba seventeen, but Pangi had only four and Brahmaur only five.⁶⁴

The land tenures in Chamba were similar to the land tenures in Kangra. The highest form of property recognized by the state was the hereditary right to cultivate. This right was conferred by a title deed (*patta*) from the raja, specifying the fields or plots granted, together with the area and the rental. The grantee did not acquire ownership in the land, which in all circumstances continued to be the property of the state. The *Chamba State Gazetteer* contains extracts from the *Kangra Gazetteer* to show how close the system of land tenures was in Chamba to that in Kangra. As in Kangra as well as Chamba, the principality as a whole formed one estate of which the raja was the landlord; he was the acknowledged fountainhead of all rights in the soil. The zamindars were only his tenants, with no rights in the land except the hereditary right to cultivate, which depended upon the punctual adjustment of all state claims. However, they were allowed to mortgage their holdings as act of grace, and they were never dispossessed unless their land was required for public purposes.⁶⁵

The system of *begar* in Chamba was also similar to that of Kangra. From ancient times all those who cultivated the soil were under obligation to give up a portion of their labour to the state. The officials at the capital and at the pargana level organized the use of *begar* for individual and state purposes. Certain categories of people were exempt from *begar*, like state officials, jagirdars, dharmarth grantees, and other respectable individuals. The rajas of Chamba used to hold annual *darbars* to which several categories of people were invited. All such people were exempt from *begar*.⁶⁶

The raja alienated revenues in favour of those individuals who served the state and came to be called jagirdars. The oldest jagirdars in Chamba were the Ranas. More important, however, were the collaterals of the ruling chiefs. They too had held jagirs for several centuries. They were under obligation to serve the state as horsemen in the raja's body-guard, providing their own horses. They also accompanied the raja with their retainers on military expeditions. No jagirdar could eject a cultivator as long as he paid the revenue in full and rendered due services to his landlord. The jagirdars were not allowed to reclaim waste and realize revenue from it. A number of jagirdar families survived into the nineteenth century in many of the parganas of all the five wazarats in Chamba.⁶⁷

Some of prominent families to survive into the twentieth century descended from the ruling family. For example, one of them was a descendant of the second son of Raja Ganesh

Varman (1512–59); another descended from a younger son of Raja Prithvi Singh (1641–54). One family was represented by a descendant of the court astrologer (*raj jyotshi*) of Raja Ganesh Varman; another family was represented by a descendant of the spiritual preceptor (*raj guru*) of Raja Ganesh Varman; another was represented by the family priest of the royal family (*raj purohit*) of Raja Ganesh Varman; and yet another family was a descendant of the court physician (*raj vaid*) of Raja Raj Singh. Some of the heads of the principal families of Chamba descended from individuals from the neighbouring states who attained important positions in Chamba state. One of them was the descendent of Raja Sukh Deo of Jasrota; another from the ruling family of Basohli; yet another from the ruling family of Bandhralta. Another example is that of the descendant of a person who had come from Ujjain in the reign of Raja Umed Singh (1748–64) to be appointed as kotwal. To these were added some of the descendants of the older Thakur and Rana families. All of them were jagirdars of the state and rendered personal service as the raja's bodyguards. Among over half a dozen prominent Rana families in Chamba, the most important was the family of Triloknath in Chamba-Lahul.⁶⁸

When Chamba came under British protection, there was no need for the services of jagirdars as horsemen. However, a small army was maintained by the state even in the early twentieth century that was in an excellent state of discipline. It was used mainly on occasions of ceremonies as a guard-of-honour for the raja. The ruler also took interest in the welfare of his soldiers, recruited mostly from among the Rajputs and the Rathis, to keep up an old tradition. There was no artillery, and the cavalry was well mounted. The soldiers were armed with the rifle.⁶⁹ This army was much smaller than the state army of Chamba in earlier centuries when most of the Chamba rulers remained active in the field, making use of a variety of arms and weapons.

The arms preserved in the Bhuri Singh Museum at Chamba give a fair idea of the kinds of weapons that were used not only in the Chamba state but probably also in the other hill principalities by the rulers and their jagirdars. Bows and arrows would be the oldest arms used in battles. Similarly, maces and battle-axes would be of ancient usage, followed by swords and shields, and daggers and knives of various kinds. Interesting among these is the double-handed two-edged sword called *khanda do dhara* or *khadga*. The use of armour also appeared in due course. In the Chamba museum there are helmets, corselets, bracelets, and coats of chain armour. There are also some flintlocks, both pistols and blunderbusses, and *jazails* nearly 8 feet long with decorated barrels. These arms were meant for the use of the rulers and members of the ruling class, but some of these would certainly be used by other warriors. Towards the end of the period we come upon a bronze muzzle-loading cannon, decorated with the trident (*trishul*). It was manufactured in the reign of Raja Charhat Singh by a workman named Legu under the supervision of Darogha Mania.⁷⁰

It was customary for the rajas of Chamba to give rent-free lands to temples and Brahmans. The inscriptions of the tenth and eleventh centuries leave no doubt that the system was already well developed. Most of the dharmarth grants that survived into the twentieth century were found in the wazarats of Chamba and Bhattiyat, indicating a pattern established in the medieval period.⁷¹ Meru Varman had built temples in Brahmapura and Chhatrari, and assigned lands for their maintenance. Similarly, Sahila Varman erected several temples, and when 'all the temples were finished, lands were assigned for their support'.⁷² A copperplate issued by Yugakara Varman in the mid-tenth century records a grant of land to a temple at Brahmapura (Brahmaur). A copperplate of Soma Varman, issued by his brother and successor Ashta Varman in the first year of his own reign, around 1080, records a grant of land in various villages around Chamba to the temples of the town.

These grants were enjoyed by the temples in Chamba till the twentieth century. That some of the later rajas of Chamba continued to extend patronage to temples is evident from the copperplate issued by Raja Prithvi Singh in 1641 recording a grant to a temple in Pangi. Raja Prithvi Singh gave another grant of land in 1646, which eventually came into the possession of a temple in Chamba town. There are several other instances of grants given initially to individual Brahmans but eventually coming to a temple at Chamba.⁷³

There are records of several grants of revenue-free land given by the rulers of Chamba to Brahmans. An early grant of the late tenth century comes from the pargana Gudyal. Another grant of the late eleventh century comes from pargana Bhattaraka. Yet another grant from pargana Gudyal comes from the early fourteenth century. In the late fourteenth and the early fifteenth centuries grants given to Brahmans in the parganas of Lilh (now Lihl), Chaturaha (now Churah), and Bakan are also known. Balbhadra of Chamba (1589–1644) has left on record a number of grants to Brahmans in the parganas of Saho, Churah, and Jasor. He also gave a grant of land to his raj guru. Another grant was given by him to the royal family priest (raj purohit). It is interesting to note that Balbhadra's son also gave a grant in pargana Saho when he was the heir-apparent; he probably died during the lifetime of Balbhadra.⁷⁴

There are several other grants of revenue-free land on record in the parganas of Panjala, Melha, Bhatti-Tikri, Sach, Saho, and Bhariya. Balbhadra gave a grant to his cook. Prithvi Singh gave a grant to his wet nurse. The wet nurse in question gave a grant of her own, presumably out of the grant received by her from the state. A grant of the late eleventh century refers to a solar eclipse as the occasion. A grant of the sixteenth century mentions that it was given by Ganesh Varman on the occasion of a pilgrimage to Badrinath and Kedarnath. Another grant was given to the guru of the raja of Chamba (raj guru) by Bahadur Singh of Kulu on the occasion of the marriage of his three daughters: Sonu, Gangu, and Rango. Partap Singh of Chamba gave a grant to a Brahman in pargana Bhariya on the occasion of the *Makar Sankranti* (hibernal solstice). It may be added that cisterns were often erected by the rajas and the Ranas as an act of charity.⁷⁵

In Chamba there was a long tradition of sculpture in metal and stone, and of wood-carving and frescos in the temples. There are no references to patronage given to the individuals connected with these activities, but it may not be unsafe to assume that they were rewarded in kind, probably through grants of revenue-free land. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the rulers of Chamba became increasingly interested in painting. Apart from inviting artists from the plains, or from the neighbouring hill states, they encouraged several families of Tarkhan painters who either belonged to Chamba or settled permanently in Chamba. They too were patronized by the rulers of Chamba.⁷⁶

On the subject of state patronage, the grant in the village Sungal deserves a special mention. It was given by a grandson of Sahila Varman in the tenth century to a Brahman who had come to Chamba from Kurukshetra. The inscription mentions a number of officials and other people constituting the social order. The term used for the grant is *agrahara*, and the land in question was granted together with the houses and the kitchen garden. It also included grass, pasture ground, fruit trees, and water courses and channels, approaches for ingress and egress, fallow land and cultivated land, and 'the fines for ten offences'. The district officers were ordered not to interfere with the land granted as free from tax. At the same time the subjects of the raja who were residing in the land granted were commanded to deliver to the grantee 'regular share and use' (*bhaga bhoga*), 'tax in kind and cash, and every other tribute due to the King'. The district officers and their subordinates were ordered not to alight at the house of the grantee, not to cut or crush the corns or sugarcane,

whether green or ripe, not to take cow's milk, not to carry off stools, benches, or couches, nor to seize his wood, fuel, grass, chaff, and so on. Similarly, non-interference was ordered to be observed in the case of the grantee's ploughmen, cowherds, maids, servants, and all other people dependent on him. An infringement of this order was liable to punishment. This grant meticulously spelt out what exactly the grantee was supposed to enjoy. He was not given the right over land, but he was entitled to almost everything else. In other words, neither he nor his descendants could alienate the land granted. This agrahara grant survived into the twentieth century with its boundaries defined in the tenth century.⁷⁷

VI

With an area of over 3,000 square miles, Chamba had a total population of about 115,000, giving it the density of about forty-one people to a square mile. However, the density of total population in cultivated areas was nearly 790, indicating the small proportion of the total area under cultivation. Only about 5 per cent of the people were living in the capital, the only town in the state. The rest lived in 1,670 hamlets, only fifteen of which had more than 500 people. Much of the land in Chamba was unavailable for cultivation. Large tracks were covered with dense forests, and the slopes were often so steep that farming operations were impossible. In many places the soil was too poor to repay the labour of the cultivator. Therefore, villages were found wherever an area of arable land was sufficient to support a few families. Occasionally, a solitary house might stand on a small patch because there was no room for more.⁷⁸

The oldest inhabitants of Chamba were represented by the people known as Koli, Hali, Sipi, Chamar, Dumna, Barwala, Megh, Drain, Rehara, Sarara, Lohar, Bhatwal, and Dhaugri, among others. They constituted about a fourth of the total population of the state and they were looked upon as 'outcaste'. The common epithet used for them was Chanal or Chandan. There was no tradition among them regarding their original home, suggesting that they were probably the original inhabitants of the area. Or they must have migrated to the hills at a very early period. They were employed in menial occupations. However, many of them worked as artisans and farm servants. In fact, some of them were small farmers, holding land either directly from the state or from high-caste landholders. They helped the high-caste people on all ceremonial occasions of any importance. They were indispensable at births, marriages, and deaths. They occupied a very low position in the social scale.⁷⁹

The Gaddis of Chamba, 'with their flocks of sheep and their formidable dogs', were found mainly in the wazarat of Brahmaur, which was also called Gadaran, meaning 'sheep country'. Therefore, the Gaddis are generally equated with shepherds. However, Gaddi as a generic name included Brahmans, Rajputs, Khattris, Thakurs, and Rathis. The majority of them were Khattris. It was said that their ancestors had fled from Lahore during the early Turkish invasions. The Gaddi Brahmans' ancestors had come to Brahmaur from Delhi towards the end of the eighth century. The Gaddi Rajputs had the same origin. It is probable that many Brahman, Rajput, and Khatri families migrated to Chamba from the plains during the early medieval centuries.⁸⁰

The number of Rajputs in the state was less than 5,000, but they occupied a prominent position in the state, primarily because the ruling house was Rajput. Many of the jagirdars who formed a small aristocracy below the raja were Rajputs. They were found in all parts of the state, but they were the most numerous in the wazarat of Bhattiyat and the

least numerous in Pangi. They retained the old prejudice against following the plough, but the majority of them had become merged with the general agricultural community. Apart from service in the army, many of them served in the civil administration of the state. The Mians, who were the elite among the Rajputs, married within their own caste; they could take daughters of Thakurs, but refused to give their own daughters to them. The Rajputs in general belonged to a number of gotras, which were divided into three grades. A considerable number of these gotras, were represented in the Chamba state. The Rajput salutation was '*jai diya*'. No other caste was authorized to assume this privilege. Certain changes took place with the passage of time and the salutation *jai diya*, like the title Mian, became more general.⁸¹

The Brahmans were far more numerous than the Rajputs, exceeding 15,000. A considerable number lived in the capital, though they were found in every part of the state. Many of them were in possession of grants of land given by the rajas. Those who lived in the capital abstained from manual work. Some were in the service of the state and others were engaged in trade. Many of them were priests in the temples, working also as purohits and cooks in families. There were more than a dozen gotras among them and more than fifty family names (*als*). They were arranged in three groups. The members of the first group took wives from the second, but did not give their own daughters in return. The first and the second group had no caste relations with the third. The Brahmans of the village Sungal were regarded as superior. Like the Brahmans of the town, they declined all communion with Brahmans who followed the plough. The Brahmans distributed over the state were mostly engaged in agricultural and pastoral pursuits. Many of them acted as priests for the village shrines and also as purohits. The hill Brahmans, both men and women, generally ate meat. Among themselves, the Brahmans used the salutation of '*namaskar*', and from others they received the salutation of '*paire pauna*'. Their response to salutation from the higher castes was '*asirbad*'; from the low castes it was '*jinde rah*'.⁸²

The Rathis formed the largest caste in Chamba, numbering about 38,000. They were found in every part of the state. No tradition of migration from the plains existed among them, suggesting that they had lived in the hills for a very long period. The Thakurs were closely allied with the Rathis. Unlike the Rathis and the Kanets, however, the Thakurs usually wore the sacred thread (*janeu*). Though in some parts of the hills the Thakurs and Rathis were regarded as almost synonymous, the former on the whole ranked a little higher. The families of Thakurs who had matrimonial connections with the Rajputs did not practise widow remarriage, a custom that was common among all other Thakurs and Rathis. Some of the Thakurs claimed to be Rajputs, but their claim was not acknowledged by others. The Rathis and Thakurs generally spoke of themselves as zamindars, and they formed the great cultivating community in Chamba. Many of them joined the army. Their family names (*als*) were almost as numerous as the villages they inhabited.⁸³

The number of Muslims in Chamba exceeded 6,000 and they were found mostly in or near the capital, and in the Churah wazarat. They were classed as Mughal, Pathan, Kashmiri, Shaikh, Gujjar, Julaha, and Fakir. The Kashmiris occupied a separate *muhalla* named after them in Chamba, and they were the most numerous among the Chamba Muslims. The Pathans had drifted into the state in search of work and then settled down as cultivators. The Julahas, who had probably been long settled in the state, lived chiefly in a suburb of Chamba known as Julakhri. The Gujjars were the last to enter the state with their herds of buffaloes and cows.⁸⁴

Almost all the ordinary trades and avocations of the people were represented in the capital. There was a great demand generally for masons and carpenters. They received

good wages for their work. Outside the capital there were only a few high class artisans. The workman called *batora* was half mason and half carpenter. The village houses, shrines, and other buildings were erected by him.⁸⁵

The food of the people generally consisted of milk, bread, *dal*, vegetables, meat, and rice. The zamindars ate three times a day, while the poorer people ate according to their means and opportunity. The dress of the people varied from wazarat to wazarat, each having its own characteristic costume by which its people could generally be recognized. There was a greater variety of costumes in the capital. The style of dress peculiar to the town was *anrakha*, a long tunic reaching up to the knees, with a cloth waistband, tight *pyjamas*, and a small turban set on the top of the head. The women wore a gown with a short bodice reaching to the waist, and below this the skirts fell away in numerous folds, almost touching the ground. The Gaddi women wore a dress similar to that of the men, made of *pattu* and called *cholu*. Both men and women in Chamba were fond of wearing ornaments of several kinds.⁸⁶

The people of Chamba amused themselves with various sports and pastimes. Dancing, wrestling, running, and jumping were popular among men. Some of them were fond of chess. Boys had their own games. A large part of the social life of the people in Chamba was connected with fairs and festivals. The *Chamba State Gazetteer* describes thirty-six festivals in a year. Most of these festivals were observed more or less fully in the capital and in the villages of the Chamba wazarat. Many of them were observed in the other wazarats.⁸⁷

The principal language of Chamba was western Pahari, consisting of five distinct dialects known as Chamiali, Gadi or Brahmauri, Bhattiali, Churahi, and Pangi or Pangwali. Chamiali, in a modified form, was used for writing; all official business with the parganas was conducted in this dialect, and it was also used for private correspondence. The script used in Chamba, called Takri, was derived from the Sharada, which was in use in Kashmir and which probably was more widely prevalent in the earlier centuries.⁸⁸ In the early centuries of the medieval period the language used in the inscriptions of Chamba was Sanskrit, written in Proto-Sharda or Sharda script. Before we come to the end of the period, the script used in official documents is Takri and the language used is that understood by the common people of the state.

For every 1000 males in Chamba, there were about 920 females. Early marriages were common, twelve or thirteen years being the upper limit. As a rule, the father of the boy paid a round sum to the girl's father, or the boy had to work for a term of about seven years in the house of his father-in-law. This custom was called *gharjawantri*. There were three kinds of marriage in vogue: *byah*, *jhanjrara*, and *jhind-phuk* or *man-marzi*. The first involved the traditional marriage ceremony after betrothal. In the second the bride put on ornaments, especially the nose-ring (*nath*), a red string to bind her hair (*dori*), and a bodice (*choli*) at the time of wedding. This rite was customary in the remarriage of a widow or of a woman divorced by her former husband. It was also called *choli-dori*. In the third the man and the woman set fire to brushwood and walked round it eight times hand in hand, which completed the marriage. Being generally a 'runaway marriage', it was regarded with disfavour. Polygamy was the rule, and a man of means could have two, three, or sometimes more wives. Polyandry did not exist in Chamba. Divorce and remarriage were common. If a widow continued to reside in her late husband's house and bore a son, the son was considered to be the legitimate heir to his mother's late husband, no matter how long a time had elapsed since his death. No enquiry was made about the child's real father, and the widow did not suffer in reputation. The son was called *chaukhand* as having been born within the 'four corners' of his mother's husband's house. The expenses of marriage were usually regulated

by the means of the contracting families and were generally very considerable. The favourite time for weddings was after the spring and autumn harvests. Female infanticide was common among the Rajputs. The other castes did not even favour the practice.⁸⁹

Hutchison and Vogel refer to the tradition of chivalry in the hills, which gave rise to popular lore of love and war. The 'Eulogy of Sarahan' relates to the construction of a temple dedicated to Shiva so that the wife of the Rana who got the temple constructed could have an unshaken friendship with the 'mountain-daughter' (Parvati). The poet who composed this eulogy praises the illustrious Satyaki, the prince, and dwells on the beauty of his beloved wife, Somaprabha (moonlight). Her form was an ornament of the world; her face was like the moon with an ever-sparkling splendour. She was exceedingly lovely and rich in virtues, like the muse of a good poet. The composer goes on to praise her beauty in detail, referring to her locks, her brow, her cheeks, her lips, her breasts, her waist, her navel, her hips, her thighs, her teeth, her hands, and her nails. The poet could be depicting the beauty of Somaprabha in conventional terms, but his description of female beauty gives an idea of what was looked for in a beautiful woman. The image evoked is not of a wife so much as of a young beloved.⁹⁰

Another eulogy, which is incomplete, refers to the virtues of a wife and a mother. The husband dies and the wife is stopped from becoming a sati by her son. She takes rigid vows of constant fasts; she has compassion for the poor; she is generous in charity; and she is devoted to Krishna. Conscious of the transitoriness of life, she makes a cistern for the sake of the bliss of her husband. The son of this devoted wife and ideal mother was given the title Rana by Raja Lalita Varman in appreciation of his martial prowess. His sword was deadly and his rod-like arms tore asunder the foes. The sole abode of grace and great by his virtues, he was 'the destroyer of his foes', and he was always 'in the forefront of the battle'.⁹¹

The practice of sati remained common among the Rajputs of Chamba. Before Umed Singh died in 1764, he left orders that no queen should become sati at his funeral. This exception points to the general rule.⁹²

Of the three major systems of religious belief and practice in Chamba, Vaishnavism appeared later than the Shaiva and the Shakta cults. One view is that the worship of Vishnu was introduced in Chamba during the reign of Raja Sahila Varman in the early tenth century. It was patronized by some of his successors also, but did not gain much influence outside the capital. Besides the temples of Lakshmi Narayan and Hari Rai in Chamba, there were several other Vishnu temples in the state, but none of them could be regarded as important. The Lakshmi Narayan temple was the most richly endowed and owned lands that brought in large revenues in cash and kind. In view of the large number of grants in favour of the temple, the raja appointed an official, called *thakur ka wazir*, for collections and disbursements in connection with the temple. He was assisted by a staff of subordinates. Offerings in money were credited into the treasury of the temple, which contained a large collection of valuables.⁹³

The worship of Shiva was widely prevalent in Chamba and it appeared to be of very ancient origin. Some of the Shaiva temples are ascribed to the reign of Meru. It was believed that his abode for half the year was on the Kailash peak at Mani Mahesh in Chamba state. For this reason the Brahmaur pargana was known as Shivbhumi or Shiva's land. The Gaddis, who were devotees of Shiva, regulated their migrations in accordance with the presence or the absence of Shiva at Mani Mahesh. Shiva's son Ganesh was also extensively worshipped in the state. There were many temples to Shiva in the state. The principal Shiva temples in the Chamba town were those of Chandra Gupta, Trimukha, and Gauri Shankar.

The first two were *linga* temples and the third contained two finely moulded figures of Shiva and Parvati in brass. There was a Shaiya temple at Brahmaur and the temple of Chandra Shekhara at Saho. In front of these temples stood the figures of a bull, the carrier (*vahan*) of Shiva. All these temples were very old. Animal sacrifice was a common feature of Shiva worship. However, the sacred food (*bhog*) generally consisted of rice, dal, and ghee. It was offered twice a day.⁹⁴

The cult of the goddess was the oldest in Chamba. Sacrifice of animals was a universal rite and traditions of human sacrifice were still current. The devis were believed to have power to inflict and remove disease in men and beasts. They also had the power to grant rain. The temples to devis were all alike and were usually situated near a village in a clump of cedar trees, regarded as the property of the deity. The foundation of devi temples was generally ascribed to the reign of Raja Mushan Varman (820–840), but some of them could be much older. Legends were associated with the devis, as with Brahmani and Chhatrahari Devi.⁹⁵

The early rulers of Chamba patronized all the three major systems of religious beliefs and practices. The policy of building and endowing temples dedicated to the deities of these three systems was followed by their successors during the medieval period. Temples were raised for some other purposes too. When Raja Udai Singh was assassinated and his brother Ugar Singh was installed as raja, the ghost of the murdered raja used to appear and cause him much distress. To lay the evil spirit, he erected a temple at Udaipur, near the place of the murder, and imposed a small tax for its maintenance, known as *triserk Udai Singhiana autariana*. The word 'autariana' referred to the fact that Udai Singh had no male child. The tax continued to be collected during later reigns. When Raj Singh died in a battle in 1794, his son and successor erected a temple on the spot and a mela was held there every year on the anniversary of his death. Raj Singh was a great devotee of Chamunda Devi, the goddess of war of the Chamba chiefs.⁹⁶

The most valuable evidence on religious beliefs in Chamba during the medieval period comes from epigraphy. The copperplate inscription of Yugakara Varman at Brahmaur invokes Shiva with meaningful synonyms qualifying his different aspects like Har, Bhava, Shiva, Tryambaka, Ishana, Rudra, and the 'source of all the five elements representing eternity'. Shiva is remembered with Parvati and their son Kartikeya. In a verse quoted from the *Harsha Charita* of Bana, Shiva is depicted as an eternal column of light supporting the universe and as the destroyer of Kala. An epithet used for Meru Varman is 'worshipper of the most exalted Shiva' (*paramashivanatah*). Possibly, Meru Varman was associated with some kind of tantric *Shaivachara*. According to the Shakta tradition, the goddess as Mahalakshmi was to be propitiated for achieving material welfare and royal glory. It is interesting to note, therefore, that the term Lakshmi for Mahishamardini in a Chamba record is possibly intended to depict her as Lakshmi or Mahalakshmi of the Shakta tradition. The other divinities referred to in the records of Chamba are Durga or Bhagvati, Ganesh, Kartikeya, Narasimha, Vishnu, and Varuna. A large number of *panihars* were raised in honour of the lord of waters, that is, Varuna, whose image was carved on fountain slabs erected generally by Brahmans and *rajankas*.⁹⁷

In the 'Eulogy of Sarahan', Shiva is mentioned as the lord whose affection is fixed on that half of his body that represents the ever-devoted Gauri, whose son is Kartikeya the three-eyed, whose wife is the daughter of Himalaya, whose diadem is marked with the stainless sickle of the moon. This eulogy also refers to Jayanta, son of Indra, the prince of the Immortals, and to the creator Brahma. Thus, the Vedic gods mentioned in Chamba records were Surya, Indra, Brahma and Varuna. The last one appeared most frequently on fountain

slabs. Sometimes the donors were depicted alongwith Varuna, the husband as horseman armed with sword and shield, and the wife standing with a water vessel in her left hand. In one case the inscription mentions religious merit (*punya*) as the motive so that the donor may be delivered from transmigration (*sansar*).⁹⁸

In one of the stone slabs the figure of Vishnu is carved to show him seated on Garud and wearing a halo, a crown, and long locks—his image as Keshava. He has three faces, with a lion and a boar on the sides; he has four arms, holding a shield and a conch in two, while the other two are placed on the heads of miniature attendants, each holding a fly whisk and a mace. A stone image of a goddess, probably Parvati, shows her holding a trident in one of her right hands and a snake in the preserved left hand; a lion rests at her feet. On another slab Shiva on his bull and two other deities (one male and one female) are shown in the upper row, while in the lower row are three figures, one male and two female, probably the donor couples. Another fountain slab has three rows of seated figures, with the four-armed Shiva seated on his bull between two conch shells at the top. In the central row there is Ganesh, and the lowest row has five figures, presumably of the donors. In another stone slab Ganesh is in the centre, holding his attributes in four arms. The inscription in Takri contains the names of Raja Udai Singh (1690–1720) and some of the local officials. Then there are slabs depicting the linga worshipped by a male, or by a male and a female together, or by two rows of three figures each.⁹⁹

In recent scholarly works we find references to the bronze icons of Gauri Shankar, the image of Vaikuntha in metal, the wooden carved temples with miniature paintings in Chamba, the wall paintings on the wooden temple of Shakti Devi, and murals depicting mythology in the Chamunda temple of Devi kothi. There are portraits of Raja Chatar Singh outside the temple of Rama, illustrations of scenes from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and *Bhagvata Purana*, including the *dasavatar* series. In the sculptures of Chamba we come upon a brass image of Shiva Parvati (Gauri Shankar) with Nandi, a stone image of Vishnu with Lakshmi seated on Garud, a stone image of Surya, a Shiva linga in stone with numerous heads, a Shiva linga in marble with three faces, a marble image of Lakshmi Narayan, a stone image of Hari Har with boar and lion heads, a stone image of Matarya, the image of a yogi in stone, the images of Ganga in stone, a stone image of Vishnu flanked by Shiva and Brahma, a stone image of Vaikuntha, a stone image of Annapurna, and a stone image of Rama.¹⁰⁰

Paintings from Chamba present very useful information on the state of religion in Chamba. There is a picture of Lakshmi Narayan painted in the mid-seventeenth century. In another picture the goddess Gayatri is seated on a full-blown lotus, with Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma on her right. The goddess Maheshwari is depicted with five faces, each with a frontal eye. She wears a garland of skulls around her neck and holds an axe, a club, a trident, and a tabor in her arms, and she is seated on Nandi. The goddess Brahmani is depicted with four faces: she is seated on a goose, and in her four hands she holds the *Veda*, a rosary, a spear, and a water pot. The goddess Vaishnavi is depicted with three faces, each with the frontal eye. In her four hands she holds a disc, a lotus, a conch, and a mace. She is seated on Garud. However, the favourite subject of the artists was the goddess Durga as depicted in *Durga-Saptshati*. In one picture Brahma reveals the greatness of Durga to Narada. In another Durga is born from the splendour of the gods. In yet another she is equipped by the gods with arms and attributes. She is attacked by a host of demons and defeats them all. She kills the demon Mahisha after he has assumed in turn the shape of a buffalo, a lion, and an elephant. The demon king Shumbha sends a messenger to Durga to urge her to become the wife of his master. The demons Chunda and Munda approach Durga, and Kali emanates from her wrinkled front. Kali offers Durga the heads of Chunda

and Munda. Kali swallows the blood flowing from the wounds of the demon Raktabija and he dies. Assisted by Kali and the Shaktis, Durga slays the army of the demon-king Nishumbha. After her victory over Shumbha, Durga is praised by the gods. A few other paintings relate to Vishnu and Brahma.¹⁰¹

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the rajas of Chamba were taking a good deal of interest in the worship of Rama and Krishna. Raja Prithvi Singh (1641–64) brought an image of Raghubir (Rama) to Chamba, probably from Delhi. Pandit Utsava, a worshipper of Lakshmi Narayan, was the first pujari of Raghubir. Understandably, the *Ramayana* of Valmiki provided suitable themes from the life of Rama to the artists of Chamba. Paintings related to the various episodes of the *Ramayana* are found in the State Museum at Chamba. A few of these include: Kaushalya with Rama, Kaikayi with Bharata, and Sumitra with Lakshman and Shatrughana; Rama kills the man-eating Tadaka, while Lakshman and Vishvamitra are standing by and the gods watch the spectacle from the clouds; Rama breaks Shiva's bow in pieces and wins Janaka's daughter Sita; Kaikayi is persuaded by Manthara to prevent Rama's consecration; Sita and Lakshman resolve to follow Rama in exile; the meeting between Rama and Bharata; Lakshman cuts off the nose of Shurpnakha; Rama pursues the antelope-shaped Maricha at the request of Sita, and Ravan carries her off; Hanuman jumps across the ocean to Lanka, the city of Ravan; Ravan is admonished by his brother Vibhishan to deliver Sita to Rama; Rama's army of deer and monkeys crosses over to Lanka.¹⁰²

Of the ten incarnations of Vishnu, the most popular in Chamba, as in many other hill states, was Krishna. Themes related to the life of Krishna were depicted from the *Bhagvata Purana*. In the State Museum at Chamba, there are a number of paintings related to these themes. Some of these include: the newly born Krishna with his parents Vasudeva and Devaki imprisoned by his maternal uncle Kansa; the infant Krishna is interchanged with a girl; Krishna kills the demoness Putana sent by Kansa to poison him with her milk; Krishna steals the milk of female cowherds; Krishna jumps into the Yamuna to subdue Kaliyanaga; Krishna lifts Mount Govardhana to give shelter to his people against the rain; Krishna slays his uncle Kansa with an elephant tusk; Rukmani sends a Brahman with a love message to Krishna; Krishna with the Brahman on his way to meet Rukmani; Shishupala marches against Krishna; the Brahman Sudama finds his hut changed into a palace by the divine power of Krishna. There are a number of themes related to Aniruddha, the grandson of Krishna, and Usha, the daughter of the demon-king Bali.¹⁰³

Buddhism survived in Chamba-Lahul in association with the Nag and Devi cults. The temple at Triloknath was served by a lama, and it was visited by pilgrims from Tibet and Nepal as well as India. It was a pilgrimage for both Buddhists and Hindus. The temple was under the control of the Rana of Triloknath. Some Buddhist customs were found in the villages of Pangi. The worship of Siddhas, who were remotely connected with Buddhism, was similar to that of Nags and Devis. Several temples were dedicated to the Siddhas, looked after by hereditary *chelas* and pujaris who belonged to various castes. Two other popular deities in the Chamba state were Gugga and Sakhi Sarvar. The stone images of Gugga had various forms. The hereditary *chelas* and pujaris who looked after the Gugga shrines were generally julahas and chamars. Gugga's chain and umbrella (*chhatar*) were paraded through the villages of Chamba for eight days after Janamashtami. The shrines of Sakhi Sarvar, also known as Sultan and Lakhdara, were found in at least ten parganas of Chamba, with images of stone. Offerings at the shrines consisted of *churma* (a mixture of flour with ghee and *gur*), with animal sacrifice. The cults of the Siddhas, Gugga, and Sakhi Sarvar had their origins in the plains, but were thoroughly indigenized in Chamba.¹⁰⁴

The cult of Sakhi Sarvar was associated with a legendary Muslim saint. Islam was represented in Chamba much more formally by the Sunni Muslims of the wazarats of Chamba and Churah. However, they were not very strict in the observance of the rites of Islam, and many local customs and superstitions were common among them. The leading feature of their life was the worship of pirs. There were two places of pilgrimage (*ziarat*) near the Chamba town: that of Shah Madar and of Shah Jamal. There was also a shrine of Lakhdata at Jalakhri. These shrines were visited by Hindus as well. The *mujawars* who looked after the shrines received offerings made in cash or kind. Muslims visited the shrines, especially on the occasion of the cutting of the first hair (*jattu*) of their children. The only mosque in the state was the one at Chamba itself.¹⁰⁵

Popular religion in Chamba was manifested in many forms: belief in benevolent and malevolent spirits, spirits of the soil, tutelary gods of families and clans, ancestor worship, spirits of the mountain, forests and trees, spirits of the water, streams and springs, Bir Betal or Khwaja Khizr, ghosts and goblins, sorcery and witchcraft, good and bad omens, unlucky months and days, evil eyes and evil spirits, and the like. Out of some of these beliefs arose the elaborately finished water fountains of Pangi and the Chenab valley. The smaller ones were called panihars, and the larger ones *nahuns*. Many of them were remarkable for the great size of the stones and the massive appearance of the structures. They were found as a rule near a natural spring, or a stream from which a supply of water was directed to maintain a continuous flow from the spouts. They were mostly the work of Ranas and wealthy zamindars.¹⁰⁶

The variety and richness of religious tradition of Chamba is very clear. It appears, however, that the bulk of this evidence relates to the religious beliefs and practices of the highest strata of the society, that is, the rulers and their Brahman or non-Brahman courtiers and officials. The religious beliefs and practices of the common people, who constituted the majority in the state, were represented by the popular cults and primordial beliefs.

VII

Kulu in its most prosperous days included the whole of the Kulu subdivision of Kangra district under the British, with the exception only of Spiti. It was bound on the north by Ladakh, on the east by Tibet, on the south by the river Sutlej and Bashahar, and on the west by Suket, Mandi, Bara-Bangahal, and Chamba. The total area of the principality was about 6,600 square miles. By temporary acquisitions from the neighbouring states, it increased sometimes to as much as 10,000 square miles. It was divided into seven provinces called *waziris*: Parol or Kulu proper, Rupī, Saraj, Lag-Maharaja, Lag-Sari, Bangahal, and Lahul.¹⁰⁷

The political history of Kulu during the medieval period appears to fall into two broad phases with the year 1500 as the dividing line. In ancient times the whole country was held by numerous Ranas and Thakurs who were the de facto rulers, generally owing allegiance to a paramount power. The founder of the Pal dynasty of the rajas of Kulu is believed to have come from the plains. Their original capital was at Nast or Jagatsukh. It was transferred to Nagar twelve generations later. At different times the Pal rulers were obliged to accept the supremacy of Chamba and Suket. In the twelfth century Kulu was invaded by the raja of Bashahr. It became tributary to Bangahal and Kangra for short periods before the end of the century. The raja of Suket appears to have established his supremacy over a number of Ranas belonging to Kulu. Important among them was Rana Bhosal who was

married to a Suket princess. His capital at Sangor was just opposite Nagar, and his chief defence was the fort of Baragarh. The raja of Suket granted the waziris of Lag-Maharaja and Lag-Sari to the family of his purohit around 1500. From this family sprang the rajas of Lag.¹⁰⁸

The last raja of Kulu to bear the suffix of Pal, Kailas Pal, ruled from 1428 to about 1450. Then there was a phase of about fifty years when there was no raja in Kulu. Many of the Ranas and Thakurs were tributary to Suket, while others had regained their independence. Towards the end of the reign of Kailas Pal, there was probably a combined revolt of the Ranas and Thakurs against the raja, which resulted in his exile from Kulu. Possibly a grandson or great-grandson of Kailas Pal became the new ruler of Kulu. He bore the name Sidh Singh to become the founder of the dynasty known as Singh or Badani.¹⁰⁹

Sidh Singh is believed to have killed a lion to earn the surname of Singh, and to be elected by the people as the raja of waziri Parol. He had to put forth strenuous efforts to subdue the Ranas and Thakurs. To this purpose he used force and diplomacy. One of the most powerful Ranas, named Jhina Rana, who held both the banks of the river Beas above Jagatsukh, was killed by his groom, nicknamed Muchhiani on account of the length of his moustache. Sidh Singh had bribed him to assassinate the Rana. The next place Sidh Singh captured was the fort of Baragarh, which, after Rana Bhosal's death, had been garrisoned by the raja of Suket. There were several other petty chiefs still to be subjugated, including the Piti Thakur whose place of worship was the Prini Temple of the great god Jamlu. Having refounded the state, Sidh Singh died in the early 1530s to be succeeded by his son Bahadur Singh.¹¹⁰

Bahadur Singh completed the subjugation of the Ranas and Thakurs. The Thakurs of waziri Rupī were paying tribute to Raja Arjun Sen of Suket who was arrogant enough to offend them without any reason, and they decided to offer their allegiance to Bahadur Singh. The greater part of Rupī came under Bahadur Singh's control. The Thakurs who held out were subjugated one by one. After subduing the whole of Rupī, Bahadur Singh settled down at Makarsa in Sainsar kothi. The name Makarsa came to be applied to the Kulu state from the time of Raja Bahadur Singh.¹¹¹

After the conquest of the waziris of Parol and Rupī, Bahadur Singh turned his attention to Saraj. Some of the Thakurs were subjugated and made jagirdars; others were defeated and killed. Having conquered half of inner Saraj, Bahadur Singh turned his attention to the kingdom of Lag which included waziris Lag-Sari and Lag-Maharaja, Saraj-Mandi, half of inner Saraj, the north-west portion of outer Saraj, and a small part of Chhota-Bangahal. A title-deed issued in 1559 to the raj guru of Chamba indicates that Hat had been annexed by Bahadur Singh. Earlier it belonged to the Lag state. The occasion of this grant was a marriage alliance between the royal families of Kulu and Chamba. Three Kulu princesses, three sisters, were married to the Chamba prince at this time.¹¹²

The reigns of Partap Singh, Parbat Singh, Prithvi Singh, and Kalian Singh from 1559 to 1637 synchronized with the reigns of Akbar, Jahangir, and partly of Shah Jahan. Though the Kulu chronicler makes no mention of the Mughals, it is probable that Kulu came under Mughal control in Akbar's reign. There is no doubt about Jagat Singh's subordination to the Mughals. He ruled from 1637 to 1672. Thirteen farṁāns were addressed to him in the 1650s. According to a farman of Aurangzeb, Jagat Singh was 'well-established in his royal ways'. He used to send hawks and falcons to Delhi as presents, and his son was at the imperial court as a hostage. Aurangzeb asked Jagat Singh to join hands with the raja of Bilaspur to close the roads against Sulaiman Shukoh, son of Dara Shukoh, who sought to rejoin his father in the Punjab.¹¹³

Jagat Singh's loyalty to the Mughal emperors enabled him to enlarge and consolidate his kingdom. From Makarsa he directed his conquest of outer Saraj and the territory on the right banks of the Beas, which was still under the raja of Lag. He invaded Lag in conjunction with the raja of Mandi. Dara Shukoh tried to intervene. A document of 1657 states that Jagat Singh had taken possession of the state of Jog Chand after his death. He was asked to restore it to Jog Chand's grandson, but Jagat Singh did not comply with Dara Shukoh's command. Jagat Singh transferred the capital from Nagar to Sultanpur around 1660 and built a palace there for himself. Before his death in 1672 Jagat Singh captured the forts of Naraingarh, Srigarh, and Himri, all in outer Saraj, and annexed them to Kulu.¹¹⁴

Bidhi Singh (1672–88) extended the boundaries of Kulu at the expense of his neighbours. To the south the state boundary became the river Sutlej and some of the small principalities of the Simla hills were subdued. Towards the north he advanced into upper Lahul and freed it from Ladakh. In outer Saraj, he annexed the kothis of Dhaul and Bramgarh. On his death in 1688 he was succeeded by Man Singh under whom the Kulu state reached the zenith of its power. He invaded Mandi to establish his control over its salt mines. He took the kothi of Pandrabis from Bashahr, completed the taluka of outer Saraj, and built several forts for its defence. Around 1700 he invaded Mandi and succeeded in annexing Bara-Bangahal, Chhota-Bangahal, and a part of Bir-Bangahal. He came to an agreement with Ladakh by which the boundary of Kulu was fixed at Lingti plain, close to the borders of Spiti. He compelled Spiti to pay tribute to him. He crossed the river Sutlej and annexed Shangri, which was held by a Thakur. A jagir was given to him. Man Singh built a number of forts and took tribute from Kotgarh, Kumharsen, and Balsan. It was during his reign that Kulu came to cover an area of about 10,000 square miles. His love for the wife of the Rana of Kumharsen resulted in his death through a treacherous ruse.¹¹⁵

Virtually nothing is known about the events of the reign of Raj Singh (1719–31). His son Jai Singh was displeased with his wazir Kalu and expelled him from the state. Kalu stirred up a revolt and Jai Singh fled to Lahore. Shamsheer Sen of Mandi invaded the state and took possession of Chuhr, which had been a part of Mandi territory for a long time. Jai Singh's brother Tedhi Singh assumed the government of Kulu in 1742, using a band of wandering Bairagis to establish his authority. There was another outbreak led by a sanyasi who claimed to be Raja Jai Singh. He was exposed and killed. Tedhi Singh had three sons by concubines and one of them, Pritam Singh, was recognized as raja in 1767. In 1778 the chiefs of Mandi, Kangra, and Chamba formed an alliance against Pritam Singh in order to annex Bangahal and to divide it among themselves. The wazir of Kulu, named Bhag Chand, was captured. He was released later on the promise of a ransom. In 1786 the chiefs of Chamba, Mandi, and Bilaspur entered into an agreement to invade and conquer Kulu. But nothing appears to have come out of this agreement. The ascendancy of Sansar Chand could probably serve as a check on their designs. Sansar Chand did not interfere much in the affairs of Kulu. Pritam Singh died in 1806 to be succeeded by his son Bikrama Singh. Kulu became tributary to Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1810 to be annexed to the kingdom of Lahore after the maharaja's death.¹¹⁶

VIII

For administrative purposes, each waziri in Kulu was divided into kothis that represented the administrative units of old. Each kothi covered a number of villages. Some of the kothis contained numerous villages and others were sparsely populated. The headman of the

kothi, called *negi*, was assisted by the headmen of villages and watchmen called *kronks*. The primary responsibility of the *negi* was to collect revenue from the entire circuit of villages in his jurisdiction, and he was remunerated by a small percentage on the collections. He also superintended all the arrangements for forced labour (*begar*) because he was expected to ensure that the travellers got supplies and their baggage was properly carried. He was an important functionary and had a good deal of influence with the people under his jurisdiction. Most of the *negis* could read and write in their own vernacular.¹¹⁷

The village headman was in somewhat superior position to the rest of the people because he received a tythe for assistance in the collection of revenues and he was exempted from all *begar*. His position was hereditary and he was not removed without sufficient reason. The task of carrying out all demands for *begar* and supplies was actually entrusted to him though the *negi* was responsible for the due performance of duty. A *chaukidar* or *kronk* was appointed to each *kothi*. But if the size of the *kothi* was large, it was necessary to appoint more than one *chaukidar*. The post was hereditary and the *kronk* received either a money allowance or regular supplies of grain for his services. The village accountant was known as *patwari*. His duty was to register all deeds of sale and transfers of land and to keep in proper order the map and plan of the *kothi* under his charge. Probably the local panchayats played an important role in the affairs of the villages. Serious offences were rather unknown in Kulu and the people were generally content with the decisions of the brotherhood.¹¹⁸

The system of *begar* was generally prevalent in Kulu. By immemorial usage the state had the right to demand *begar* in the case of all government works and for the portage of travellers' goods. The zamindar regarded it as the natural order of things when called upon to give his labour to the state or to the carry travellers' effects. Sometimes a zamindar had to come from a long distance.¹¹⁹

The bulk of the population in the state consisted of Kanets and Daghis. In the late nineteenth century there were nearly 53,000 Kanets and over 26,000 Daghis in a total population of a little more than 100,000. The number of Brahmans was a little more than 6,500. The Rajputs were less than 350. Among the other categories of people who could be regarded as below the Brahmans and Rajputs and above the Kanets and Daghis in social status were Khattris, Baniyas, Suds, Mahajans, Bhats, and Kaits. Their total number did not exceed 500. More than 1,000 persons belonged to the category of Gosains, Naths, and Bairagis. The remaining population consisted of Kalals, Ghiraths, Sunars, Kumhars, Lohars, Dhobis, Chamars, Thathiyars, Julahas, and the like. Their total number did not exceed 2,000. Thus, the population of Kulu consisted very largely of Kanets and Daghis. The Brahmans and Rajputs formed only about 7 per cent of the population but held about 33 per cent of the land under cultivation. Much of the rent-free land was in the hands of the Brahmans. However, with the exception of the rajas, their descendants and their purohits, the Brahmans and Rajputs differed very little from the Kanets in appearance, dress, or customs. Both Brahmans and Rajputs commonly married Kanet girls. Such wives were known as *srit* to be distinguished from the *lari* or wife of their own caste taken by the regular marriage ceremony (*biah*).¹²⁰

The Kanets belonged to the low caste of cultivators. They claimed to be of impure Rajput origin, but they were probably of aboriginal stock. They were divided into two main tribes, the Khasia and the Rao. The former could have descended from intercourse between the Aryan immigrants and the women of the hills. The distinction between them and the Raos was well marked. The Khasia observed the period of impurity after the death of a relation prescribed for a twice-born man, and the Rao observed the period prescribed

for an outcaste. The Khasia wore the sacred thread but the Rao did not. Nevertheless, the two freely ate together and intermarried. The Lohars and Chamars worked in iron and leather for the Kanets, and they were paid by certain grain allowances. The builders and masons, known as Tawis, also ranked below the Kanets. However, they were ranked above the Daghis.¹²¹

There were no Chanals in Kulu but there were people who referred to themselves as Daghi Chanals or Koli Chanals. Therefore, Daghi, Koli, and Chanal meant very nearly the same thing in Kulu. It was believed that the word Daghi was derived from *dagh* (cattle) because they carried away the carcasses of dead cattle and ate the flesh. The Daghis and Kolis in Kulu shared this work with the Chamars who took the skin and divided the flesh. The Daghis carried palanquins at marriages. The dress of Daghis did not differ materially from that of the Kanets; it was only coarser in material and scantier in shape. Their mode of life was also much the same.¹²²

The Gosains, Naths, and Bairagis belonged to the Shaiva, Gorakhnathi, and Vaishnava systems. In the course of time many of them discarded their religious pretensions and adopted secular professions, generally cultivating land with their own hands like the other peasants. The Bairagis had originally come from the plains, but later the title was taken by descendants mostly of Brahmans or Kanets who became their disciples. The Naths were Daghis with their ears pierced. They were descendants of religious mendicants.¹²³

Brahmans belonging to Kangra families but living in Sultanpur did not intermarry with the village Brahmans of Kulu. If any such marriage took place, the offspring was considered to be illegitimate by the Kangra Brahmans. Khatri from the plains took wives from Khatri families living in Kulu, but they did not give their daughters in marriage to them. Probably the 'outsiders' regarded themselves as superior to the native people of the same caste. The Rao and Khasia intermarried and ate together without any distinction. A Sunar could marry a Kanet woman or cohabit with her, which in Kulu was the same; but he did not give his daughter in marriage to a Kanet. The lowest category in the social scale were called the eighteenth *jat*, that is, the odd caste that was not required. No one ate from their hand. Thus, on the whole, though there was no strict correspondence with the ideal varna order, the social order in Kulu was quite hierarchical, with a strong notion of purity and pollution. The Brahmans and Rajputs were at the top, the trading communities below them, followed by the Kanets. The rest of the population was virtually outcaste. Significantly, the dominating castes formed only a small proportion of the total population.¹²⁴

The bulk of the population in Kulu lived in the countryside in hamlets and small villages. The capital of the state was the only town. Harcourt has well described the rhythm of village life. The description is all the more important for being applicable more or less to the villages of several other hill states. During spring the cut corn could be seen lying loosely about or dangling in great sheaves from verandas. As summer changed into autumn, the ricks of green grass were strewn over each roof or flat surface, mixed with the rich yellow corn cast in ruddy layers on every roof. In the verandas the village women with their scarlet, blue, or yellow kerchiefs could be seen attending to their children, or below in the courtyard assisting to spread out the grass they had just brought in, or working in couples at the cleaning of the rice from the husk. Towards evening the cattle were driven in from grazing, and each herdsman or herdsman brought in his or her quota of field or firewood weeds. With the household operations of rice cleaning, oil-pressing, and blanket-weaving, a Kulu village was one perpetual scene of life and animation. Appropriately, almost all houses had beehives.¹²⁵

Social differentiation was reflected in the morphology of the village. The Brahmans generally took the highest sites. The Kanets and the Daghis occupied the lower tier of houses. The zamindar's house was a somewhat picturesque object, with its gabled roof of slate or shingle, its overhanging verandas, and the massive stone walls surrounded by a flat paved court. The double storied house was the most common. The upper apartments were reserved for the household and lower ones for the stacking of grain or stalling of cattle. A low-caste family could be seen living in a small shed close to the Brahman's house; no return was looked for, but the low-caste family did not lose sight of the generosity of the Brahman.¹²⁶

In summer the men wore loose grey woollen trousers and a short coat of the same material; in winter they used a country blanket to cover their shoulders and their body. The waist was bound with another cloth of linen or pattu, and the headdress consisted of a black or deep maroon cap of rolled cloth with a patch of red at the top. Every well-to-do zamindar wore a silver necklace and the higher-class Brahmans decked themselves with small earrings. The dress of the women consisted of a large plaid, generally of different colours, from a whitish-grey and deep maroon or brown to white and black checks. Around the waist a small blanket was invariably worn. In the winter woollen trousers were adopted, but in the summer they were bare-legged. However, the wives of the richest zamindars could occasionally be seen with cotton trousers of blue, red, or yellow cotton, and a small cap, secured by a fillet of bright wool, or the full gala attire, which included a small cap of cherry and yellow, or white and brown, in alternate bars, perched over the forehead.¹²⁷

The women of Kulu resented oppression and ill usage, and did not hesitate to act as they pleased in defiance of relations and friends. Marriage was regarded as sacred neither by men nor by women. The Kulu zamindar wanting to secure a wife visited a family where there were daughters, and expressed a desire to marry one of them. The girl in question was expected to give her consent. A state of concubinage was not looked upon with disapproval. Widows were supposed to be free agents and, if young, were always remarried. The betrothal and marriage ceremonies were simple.¹²⁸

The practice of sati was common, but it was confined to the Rajput families. Below the castle at Nagar there were tombstones ornamented with rude carvings of the chiefs of Kulu, with their wives and concubines portrayed either beside them or in lines below. It was reported that these stones were placed in position at the death of every reigning sovereign of Kulu, and the female figures were the effigies of such wives or mistresses who had performed sati at their 'lord's' demise. On some of these tombstones there were forty to fifty female figures. There was also a rude statue of a woman half-imbedded in the ground. It was said that this was the statue of a queen of Kulu who was suspected of infidelity and threw herself out of the castle's window in a fit of indignation.¹²⁹

When Jhinna Rana was shot by the Muchhiani, his wife ordered the funeral pyre to be prepared and set fire to the fort, perishing with all her women, including the Muchhiani's wife. After becoming a sati, the rani was believed to have become a goddess (*jogin*). A shrine was raised to her and she was regarded as having control over the weather. When rain was needed, some Muchhianis were sent to burn a cow's skin near her shrine and it had the desired effect. The Muchhiani's wife was also worshipped as a *jogin*.¹³⁰

Like Buddhism earlier, the religious systems known as Shaiva, Shakta, and Vaishnava were known in Kulu during the medieval period. All temples had priests and the better class had a regular relief of Brahmans who took it in turn to attend to the performance of daily services and the cleanliness of the building. There were three distinct kinds of temples in Kulu, which probably marked different eras of religious belief and, perhaps, infusion of

new races with the older inhabitants. One of these was the pyramidal carved stone temple; another was the rectangular stone and wood temple furnished with a pent roof and veranda; and the third was the rectangular stone and wooden temple provided with successive wooden roofs, one on top of the other. The total number of temples was less than a score. The most notable of these was the temple at Bajaura. It was a pyramidal stone temple with ornate carvings and figures portrayed on the outer walls and the entrance. One of the deities depicted in the sculpture was probably Ganesh. The linga inside the temple indicated that it was dedicated to Shiva. At Jagatsukh a rectangular temple contained the sculptures of Shiva and Parvati, sitting in a semi-recumbent attitude on a bull. Shiva held a trident in his right hand and Parvati had three snakes depicted over her head. However, the central stone image in the temple was that of Kali depicted with four hands. Some features of this temple could be recognized as Buddhist.¹³¹

The temple at Sultanpur was dedicated to Raghunath. It was built by Raja Jagat Singh (1640–70). The image of Raghunath had been brought to Kulu by Raja Jagat Singh himself. He is said to have formally conveyed his realm to the god by placing the image on the gaddi. The rajas of Kulu regarded themselves as the vice-regents of Raghunath, and as ruling only in his name. Jagatsukh kothi was made dharmarth in the name of Raghunath. Jagat Singh also ordered that one rupee and two copper coins should be placed before the deity everyday, and this money should be put aside to be sent to Ayodhya every year. Jagat Singh built some other stone temples in Kulu, notably the one at Basisth. The rectangular stone and wooden temples with pent roofs were perhaps the most ancient. These were scattered all over the country. Perhaps the most remarkable of these temples was the one at Bijli Mahadev, more than 800 feet above sea level on the right bank of the Parbati river. It was large and substantially built. Dedicated to Mahadev, it was a place of pilgrimage, with a dharmashala close to the main building. The hot springs at Manikaran and Basisth were provided with temples.¹³²

An extremely interesting temple in Kulu was that of the goddess Hidimba who was probably worshipped from very remote times. Though she was associated with Bhima of the *Mahabharata*, her worship was pre-Aryan and it was attended with human sacrifice at one time. The Brahmans regarded her as a man-eating demoness. She seems to have been the patron deity of the Kulu valley from the early times. She was believed to have granted the country to the Kulu rajas. Even after the introduction of the worship of Raghunath, she maintained her authority. The rajas of Kulu called her 'grandmother'. A jagir was attached to her temple and its officers used to exercise full powers in the jagir without reference to the rajas. In fact, the jagir enjoyed the right of sanctuary. When a criminal or anyone else fleeing from the raja's displeasure succeeded in reaching the borders of the jagir, he became Hidimba's refugee, and was not given up to his pursuers. Hidimba attended the Dashera in honour of Raghunath, but she had the privilege of coming late.¹³³

The affections of the people were more particularly concentrated on their own local deities whose help was invoked in trouble and by whom they swore when taking an oath. Small shrines were found everywhere, either in some wooden recesses of the mountains or close to cascades. Local deities were held in high esteem, but the temples consecrated to them were often very small. Among the 'national amusements' of Kulu were fairs (melas). Almost every village of any size had its fair, generally held in honour of the local devta or devi. The village divinity was brought out, decked with silver or gold, and dressed in coats and covered with flowers; then, placed on a wooden temple (*rath*) or sedan chair, it was carried on the shoulders of two men preceded by attendants beating drums and blowing through enormously long and curved trumpets of brass or copper. In the vicinity of the temple a

space was cleared for dancers moving in a circle around musicians seated in the centre. The men danced, and both men and women looked on from every house top. At the end of the day the women took up the dancing, and revelry became fast and furious. A drink made from fermented rice, called *lugri*, was imbibed in large quantities. Though religious in a certain sense, these fairs provided entertainment in which everyone could join.¹³⁴

The principal fairs in Kulu were held at Sultanpur in October, at Plach in May, and at Nirmand in autumn. The Sultanpur fair took place at the Dashera festival. Though the meeting was more of a religious than of a mercantile character, a considerable amount of business was transacted. The goods sold consisted of shoes, brass and copper pots, coloured wools, jewellery, and petty headdresses. The fair was the most celebrated in the state and it was customary to bring some 360 local deities to pay their respects to the presiding shrine of Raghunath. It went on for nearly a week. All roads leading to Sultanpur were thronged with gaily-dressed crowds of men, women, and children, bearing in procession the god of their own hamlet. Meanwhile, the devotees attached to the Raghunath temple made their preparations. Among other things, they provided the wooden temple with wheels (rath), and decked it liberally with coloured clothes and flowers. The idol of Raghunath was placed in the rath and all the local deities were brought up, with pomp and music, and arranged around the central figure. The high priest prayed to the god and the leading men of Kulu, headed by the ruler, walked rapidly three times around the rath, which was then borne along for a few hundred yards by an enthusiastic crowd, followed by all the smaller gods. The people repaired to their own camps after the procession returned to the temple. These ceremonies were performed on the closing day also when a sheep or goat was killed and a clay figure of Ravan, the enemy of Raghunath, was decapitated.¹³⁵

The entry of Raghunathji in Kulu was symbolic of the Vaishnava influences that began to appear in the state during the seventeenth century. Themes from the *Puranas* and the epics were chosen for treatment by artists under state patronage. Some of the paintings related to the *Ramayana* were produced in Kulu before the end of the seventeenth century. Some of the themes depicted the departure of Rama and Lakshman, to the forest, the sorrow of Rama, and the hermitage of Valmiki with Sita, Lav and Kush.¹³⁶ It has been remarked that the *Ramayana*

provides a social ideal and tells how man by righteous conduct may approach to a nearer union with God. Rama is the ideal son who volunteers for exile so that the pledge given by his father may be fulfilled. Lakshmana is the ideal brother who suffers the hardships of life in the forests so that he may serve his brother. Sita is the ideal wife, perfection of beauty, goodness, faithfulness and loyal love.

The ideals were suitable for a conservative and patriarchal society in which the ideal of *varnashramadharma* was upheld in theory and sought to be upheld in practice.

IX

The three states under consideration present more similarities than differences with one another. Their administrative units and functionaries were broadly similar. The polity in all the three states was monarchical, with power concentrated in the hands of the ruler who claimed proprietary rights over all the land in the state. All rights to culturable land, pastures and natural resources were bestowed upon others by him and he had the right to resume. However, revenues alienated in favour of Brahmans and temples tended to be-

come perpetual. Even the lowest subject of the state had equal right to the resources marked by the ruler as common. The rulers patronized art and architecture. The art of painting flourished in all the three states in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The rulers who become *mansabdārs* of the Mughal empire increased their resources and became more powerful than their neighbours.

Of the three states, Kangra had the largest population. Far behind Kangra in numbers was Chamba, followed closely by Kulu. The bulk of the population in all the three states lived outside the capital city, the only urban centre in a state. The upper castes, consisting of Rajputs and Brahmans, represented only a small percentage of the total population, but they held land out of all proportion to their numbers. The ideal of a four-fold hierarchical social order was supported in theory but in actual practice a large proportion of the population did not belong to any of the four castes. *Satī* was practised only by the upper castes, especially the Rajputs. They did not favour the marriage of widows either. Among the lower castes, widow remarriage was common and widows could inherit property. Within the general framework of patriarchal family, women in the hills appear to have enjoyed more freedom, and more rights, than in the plains.

Popular religious, especially the worship of village deities, was prevalent in all the three states. There were traces of Buddhism in Kulu and Chamba but not in Kangra. The worship of the Goddess and Shiva was widespread, but Vaishnavism too was represented in all the three states. The state deity in Kangra remained the Goddess throughout the medieval period. In Chamba, the state deity was Vishnu as Lakhshmi Narain. In Kulu, Raghunath ji became the state deity before the close of the medieval period. The presence of Islam in Chamba suggests its contacts with Kashmir, and the presence of the cult of Sakhi Sarwar in Chamba suggests its contacts with the Punjab plains.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 J. Hutchison and J. Ph. Vogel, *History of the Panjab Hill States* (2 vols) (Shimla: Department of Languages and Culture, 1982 [reprint]), pp. 39–40.
- 2 Samuel Beal (tr.), *Si-ya-ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World* (2 vols.) (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1995 [reprint]), pp. 148–64, 175–8.
- 3 In Kangra and Chamba most of the old families appear to have been Ranas, with a few Thakurs. In Kulu there were a few Ranas and most of the old families were Thakurs. In many cases the descendants of Ranas and Thakurs retained possession of their family domains, while many more sank to the position of common farmers though they were still addressed as Ranas or Thakurs. Hutchison and Vogel, *History of the Panjab Hill States*, pp. 15–16, 18.
- 4 The present state of Himachal Pradesh was formed in the 1950s. It is interesting to note, however, that the hill country adjoining the Punjab was known as Himachal in medieval times, if not earlier. Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama* (translated by H. Beveridge) (Delhi: S.S. Publications, 1977 [reprint]), p. 31.
- 5 Hutchison and Vogel, *History of the Panjab Hill States*, pp. 115–17.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 117–18.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 125.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 126.
- 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 129.
- 10 Timur's *Memoirs* quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 132–4.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- 12 According to Abul Fazl, many hill chiefs paid homage to Akbar in the very first year of his reign. Dharm Chand was held in high estimation because of his superiority among the contemporary chiefs, and he was foremost in obedience to Akbar. He was honoured by His Majesty's attention. Abul Fazl, *Akbarnama*, vol. I, p. 662; vol. II, pp. 35, 73–4, 76–80, 89–91, 96.

- 13 Hutchison and Vogel, *History of the Panjab Hill States*, p. 138.
- 14 Ibid., pp. 149–50, 151.
- 15 Ibid., pp. 153, 156, 158, 159, 160, 164–6, 169–70.
- 16 Ibid., p. 173–5.
- 17 Ibid., pp. 175–7.
- 18 Ibid., pp. 176–80. A couple of documents in the Bhuri Singh Museum at Chamba contain information on Sansar Chand's agreement with some of the neighbouring states. J. Ph. Vogel, *Catalogue of the Bhuri Singh Museum at Chamba* (Calcutta: 1909), Appendix IV, C23, C24.
- 19 Hutchison and Vogel, *History of the Panjab Hill States*, pp. 180–87, 193.
- 20 Ibid., pp. 50, 192.
- 21 Ibid., pp. 101–2, 104–5, 106–8.
- 22 Ibid., pp. 211–12.
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- 24 M.S. Randhawa, *Basohli Paintings* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1954), p. 19.
- 25 Lepel Griffin, *Ranjit Singh*, (Delhi: S. Chand and Co., 1967 [reprint]), pp. 13–14.
- 26 Hutchison and Vogel, *History of the Panjab Hill States*, p. 98.
- 27 *Gazetteer of the Kangra District, 1883–84*, vol. I, pp. 98–9.
- 28 Ibid., p. 99.
- 29 Ibid., pp. 108–12.
- 30 Ibid., p. 237.
- 31 Ibid., pp. 237–8.
- 32 Ibid., pp. 239–41.
- 33 Ibid., pp. 82–3.
- 34 Ibid., pp. 83–8.
- 35 Ibid., pp. 88–9.
- 36 Ibid., pp. 88–90.
- 37 Ibid., pp. 90, 91–3.
- 38 Ibid., pp. 94–5.
- 39 Ibid., pp. 95–6.
- 40 Ibid., pp. 96–8.
- 41 Ibid., pp. 60–2.
- 42 Ibid., pp. 71–2.
- 43 Ibid., pp. 62–5.
- 44 Ibid., p. 65.
- 45 Ibid., pp. 67–8, 71–2.
- 46 Mahesh Sharma, 'Dimensions of Pilgrimage: A Case Study of Jalandhara Pitha', in Joseph T. O'Connell (ed.), *Organizational and Institutional Aspects of Indian Religious Movements* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1999), p. 45.
- 47 Randhawa, *Basohli Paintings*, pp. 52, 54, 46, 58, 66; Hutchison and Vogel, *History of the Panjab Hill States*, pp. 190–91.
- 48 Hutchison and Vogel, *ibid.*, pp. 290–95.
- 49 Ibid., pp. 297–9.
- 50 Ibid., pp. 299–303..
- 51 Ibid., pp. 304–5, 306–7. The text of the document containing the result of arbitration in favour of Chamba is reproduced, with English translation, by Vogel (*Catalogue of the Bhuri Singh Museum*, Appendix III, Sanad I).
- 52 Hutchison and Vogel, *History of the Panjab Hill States*, pp. 308, 309. It is interesting to note that Raja Chatar Singh of Chamba was a mansabdar of 1,000 zat under Aurangzeb. M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1966), p. 214. Understandably, the grant of the pargana of Bhalai was confirmed in favour of Chamba early in the reign of Aurangzeb in 1666. Vogel, *Catalogue of the Bhuri Singh Museum*, Appendix IV, C4.
- 53 M. Athar Ali, *Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb*, p. 267; Vogel, *Catalogue of the Bhuri Singh Museum*, Appendix IV, C11; Hutchison and Vogel, *History of the Panjab Hill States*, pp. 309–12.
- 54 Vogel, *ibid.*, Appendix IV, C6–C16.
- 55 From the documents cited above, it appears that Raj Singh sought help from the Sikhs against his opponents, notably the chiefs of Kangra and Jammu. He promised to pay revenues to the Khalsa and was

hopeful of great favours, having placed himself under the protection of the Khalsa who was probably Gurbakhsh Singh, son of Jai Singh Kanhiya.

- 56 Hutchison and Vogel, *History of the Panjab Hill States*, pp. 314–19.
- 57 Vogel, *Catalogue of the Bhuri Singh Museum*, Appendix IV, C22–C41, C43, C58.
- 58 Hutchison and Vogel, *History of the Panjab Hill States*, pp. 319–21.
- 59 Ibid., pp. 64–5.
- 60 *Gazetteer of the Chamba State*, 1964, Punjab State Gazetteers, Vol. XXII A, p. 261.
- 61 Ibid., pp. 261–2.
- 62 Ibid., pp. 262, 269.
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- 64 Ibid., pp. 265–6, 285.
- 65 Ibid., pp. 267–9, 275.
- 66 Ibid., pp. 271–4.
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- 71 *Chamba State Gazetteer*, pp. 281–2.
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- 73 J. Ph. Vogel, *Catalogue of the Bhuri Singh Museum*, B1, B2, B5, B30, B35.
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- 76 Karl Khandalawala, 'The Princess's Choice: Keynote Address', in V.C. Ohri (ed.), *A Western Himalayan Kingdom: History and Culture of the Chamba State* (New Delhi: Books and Books Publications, 1989), pp.1–13; B.N. Goswamy, 'Geneologies of Some Artists' Families of Chamba', in *ibid.*, pp.172–89; Karuna Goswamy, 'Portraits from Chamba: Some Notes on their Meaning and Context', in *ibid.*, pp.206–14; Ajit Singh, 'Drawings from Chamba', in *ibid.*, pp.215–20.
- 77 M.C. Joshi, 'Reflections of Socio-cultural Life in the Early Inscriptions of Chamba', in Ohri, *A Western Himalayan Kingdom*, pp. 30–37.
- 78 *Chamba State Gazetteer*, pp. 118–19.
- 79 Hutchison and Vogel, *History of the Panjab Hill States*, pp. 271–73; *Chamba State Gazetteer*, pp. 163–5.
- 80 Hutchison and Vogel, *ibid.*, pp. 273–4. *Chamba State Gazetteer*, pp. 137–51
- 81 *Chamba State Gazetteer*, pp. 132–4.
- 82 Ibid., pp. 130–2.
- 83 Ibid., pp. 134–6.
- 84 Ibid., pp. 165–6.
- 85 Ibid., pp. 201–4.
- 86 Ibid., pp. 204–8.
- 87 Ibid., pp. 210–19.
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- 89 Ibid., pp. 126–9.
- 90 Vogel, *Catalogue of the Bhuri Singh Museum*, Appendix II, A.
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- 92 Hutchison and Vogel, *History of the Panjab Hill States*, p. 314.
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- 94 Ibid., p. 181.
- 95 Ibid., pp. 184–9.
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- 97 M.C. Joshi, 'Reflections on Socio-Cultural Life', pp. 26–8.
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- 109 Ibid., pp. 442–4.
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- 112 Ibid., pp. 454–6.
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- 114 Ibid., pp. 460–62.
- 115 Ibid., pp. 462–4.
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- 121 Ibid., pp. 38–9, 41–3.
- 122 Ibid., p. 43.
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- 125 Harcourt, *The Himalayan District of Koolloo*, p. 47.
- 126 Ibid., p. 46.
- 127 Ibid., pp. 42–4.
- 128 Ibid., pp. 72, 90–91.
- 129 Ibid., p. 108.
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- 131 Ibid., p. 59. Hieun Tsang had observed that there were about twenty Buddhist monastries and about 1,000 priests who mostly studied the 'Great Vehicle'. There were also fifteen *deva* temples. Samuel Beal (tr.), *Si-ya-ki*, vol. I, p. 177. Harcourt, *The Himalayan Districts of Kooloo*, pp. 60, 108, 109.
- 132 Hutchison and Vogel, *History of the Panjab Hill States*, pp. 426–7.
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CHAPTER 22

State and Society in the Punjab (1750–1850)

Indu Banga

In the wake of the decline of the Mughal power during the eighteenth century, several new centres of power came up in different regions of the empire. Unlike many of these ‘successor’ states that nominally acknowledged the Mughal authority, the political struggle of the Khalsa, that is the followers of Guru Gobind Singh derived legitimacy from their defiance of the oppressive Mughal state. Their religious ideology motivated and guided them and also informed their policies and measures when they acquired territories. While continuing broadly with the Mughal framework, the Sikh rulers from Banda Bahadur to Ranjit Singh consciously tried to exercise power in a manner that involved and affected a much larger proportion of the region’s population.

I

Commissioned by Guru Gobind Singh in September 1708, Banda Bahadur set out from Nanded, armed with the Guru’s *hukamnāmas* for his Khalsa in the north, and accompanied by about a score of them. Towards the end of 1709 Banda attacked Samana in the *sarkār* of Sirhind, humbled its administrator, and plundered the place. After the sack of Sirhind in May 1710 and the death of its *faujdār* Wazir Khan, Banda occupied the plains between the rivers Sutlej and the Yamuna, and heralded a new state by striking a coin, deriving authority from God through the grace of the Gurus Nanak and Gobind Singh. He issued orders with a seal invoking the Gurus as the source of prosperity and power. Following the contemporary imperial practice, he initiated a ‘regnal era’ from the fall of Sirhind. Banda set up his ‘capital’ at Mukhlispur in the Shivalik hills and renamed it Lohgarh. He appointed his own revenue collectors and garrison commanders, and extracted tribute from the hill principalities which had been subject to the Mughal empire. The ordinary people, including ‘a lowly sweeper or cobbler’, got opportunities for participation in the new political order. In his *hukamnāma*, dated 12 December 1710, Banda claims to have established *satjug*, the rule of the true dharma.¹

According to Ratan Singh Bhangu, the earliest historian of the Khalsa, the veteran followers of Guru Gobind Singh (*Tat-Khālsa*) charged Banda with having assumed 'rulership' whereas he had been only assigned 'service'. They maintained that the tenth Guru had bestowed sovereignty upon the Khalsa Panth. They charged Banda with deviation from Khalsa practices by adopting the salutation '*fateh darshan*', by insisting upon vegetarianism, and by preferring red dress over the traditional blue of the Singhs. His observance of *chaukā* (plastered square space) militated against the practice of collective dinning. Therefore, the staunch Khalsa dissociated themselves from Banda before the final siege in 1715. Mata Sundri, the widow of Guru Gobind Singh, is believed to have lent her moral support to the Tat-Khālsa in their tussle first against Banda and then against his followers (Bandais). Around 1720 the Tat-Khālsa succeeded in ousting the Bandais from Amritsar.²

After the execution of Banda and hundreds of his followers at Delhi in 1716, the Mughal state intensified repression against the Khalsa, and each severed head fetched a reward. The number of the politically active Singhs dwindled appreciably, but there remained a hard core who believed that the Khalsa Panth was destined to be sovereign. They believed in Guru Gobind Singh's prophecy of rulership for every Singh horseman (*hanne hanne mīr*).³ A sense of purpose and confidence crystallized in the phrase '*rāj karegā Khālsa*' inspired their activity.⁴

The ideal of sovereignty, armed conflict (*dangā*), and martyrdom went together in the consciousness of the Khalsa. The veterans attached a special significance to sacrifice made in the cause of righteousness. According to Sainapat, the court poet of the tenth Guru, he regarded the death of his eldest son in the battle of Chamkaur as 'proof of Khalsahood'.⁵ Martyrdom put a seal on the Singh's faith, and like the congregation (*sangat*) and five Singhs, martyrs came to be regarded as a source of boons and fulfilment of wishes.⁶ Ratan Singh Bhangu emphasizes that 'the way to sovereignty lay through blood'—one's own if not of the enemy.⁷ The well-known martyrs of the Khalsa, from Tara Singh to Gurbakhsh Singh Nihang, belonged to the most intense phase of repression and political struggle, that is from the late 1720s to early 1760s.

Abdus Samad Khan, the vanquisher of Banda, was shifted to Multan in 1726 to make way for his energetic son Zakariya Khan. The all-out efforts of the new provincial governor proved ineffective. The number of the active Khalsa and their bands (*jathas*) seemed to be growing and their exploits becoming more daring. Zakariya Khan persuaded the emperor to induct them into the imperial framework. In 1733 their 'leader' was offered revenues of a number of villages near Amritsar, a robe of honour and the title of 'nawāb'. The offer was accepted after some hesitation and Kapur Singh became the 'nawāb'. He organized the Khalsa into five large units (*deras*), each with a common kitchen, stores, arsenal, and granary for horses. Each dera had its own leader and standards (*nishān*). Two of the deras were led by Jats, two by Khattris, and one by an 'outcaste' named Bir Singh Ranghreta who is reported to have 1,300 horsemen under him.⁸

The Khalsa code of conduct (*rahit*) was sought to be popularized at the same time. The extant *Rahit-nāmas* or 'manuals' of conduct, attributed to Bhai Nandlal and Chaupa Singh, were probably copied between 1740 and 1760. 'Emphatically corporate', their injunctions govern the personal and social behaviour of the individual and his religious life as well as attitude towards 'others'. The obligation 'to bear and reverence arms' and the constant readiness to fight were integral to the prescribed *rahit*; 'the right to rule' was to be 'won and sustained by the sword'.⁹

Zakariya Khan resumed the villages he had given to the Khalsa and tried to establish control over Amritsar. Bhai Mani Singh courted martyrdom for his activities at Amritsar as

the rallying centre of the Khalsa. It spurred them into more daring action that spilled into the sarkār of Sirhind. In 1739 they became bold enough to plunder the rear of the armies of Nadir Shah who had massacred the residents of Delhi, humiliated the Mughal emperor, annexed his territories, and extracted submission and tribute from Zakariya Khan. The daring of the Singhs was noticed by Nadir Shah, and on his learning that their 'homes were their saddles', he is believed to have warned Zakariya Khan about their potential to dislodge him from power.¹⁰

By the time of Zakariya Khan's death in 1745, the bands of the Khalsa, by now synonymous with Singhs, and their strength had increased. Diwan Lakhpāt Rai of Lahore managed to kill thousands of them in a massive action (*ghallūghārā*) in 1746, but they soon recovered from this blow during the civil war between Zakariya Khan's sons in 1747. In 1748 the number of their jathas under old and new leaders was reported to range from thirty-eight to sixty-five.¹¹ They decided to pool together their forces as the Dal Khalsa for more effective action. The construction of the mud fortress of Ram Rauni near Amritsar around this time may be seen as a symbolic declaration of the beginning once again of territorial occupation. Significantly, all the Singhs, the leaders as well as the followers, are said to have contributed labour towards the construction of the fortress named after the fourth Guru, Ram Das, the founder of Amritsar.¹² Their collective enterprise now entered a new phase.

II

In 1748, the young and energetic Mughal governor of Lahore, Muin ul-Mulk, and the victor of Kabul, Ahmad Shah Abdali, appeared on the scene as contenders for power. When Abdali invaded Lahore in 1752 Muin ul-Mulk received no help from Delhi. He felt obliged to accept the sovereignty of Ahmad Shah Abdali. On behalf of his new master, Muin ul-Mulk continued his repressive measures against the Khalsa until his sudden death in 1753. There were several changes of 'governors' at Lahore until 1757 when the Mughal emperor was obliged formally to cede the provinces of Lahore and Multan and the sarkār of Sirhind to the ruler of Kabul. Abdali now appointed his son Timur Shah as the governor of Lahore and left for his support a large army under a veteran general. Within a year, the Marathas, in combination with the Singhs, challenged the cession of territory to Kabul and ousted Abdali's son from the Punjab. In April 1761, however, Ahmad Shah struck a decisive blow on the Marathas at Panipat.

It was precisely during the years of Ahmad Shah's ascendancy that the Khalsa occupied pockets of fertile territories in the upper interfluvial tracts (*doābs*). The earliest available document points to the establishment of the rule of an individual Singh in 1752. In this order, Hakumat Singh addressed the 'present and future *āmils* and *zamīndārs* of *qasba* Kahnuwan', referring to the 'rule of the emperors' as the 'old order'. He issued another such order on 17 January 1755 using the seal of 1752. Jai Singh Kanhiya's seal under which he was issuing orders in the 1770s and 1780s was inscribed as early as 1750. Another extant order addressed to the 'āmils of Kahnuwan' is dated 22 March 1761; it was issued by one Gaura Singh. That he remained in occupation of the area at least till 1768 is evident from another of his orders.¹³ We know from other sources that Kapur Singh had occupied a few villages in the upper Bari doāb before his death in 1753. In fact, several other leaders extended their protection over villages and occupied territories during the 1750s. Prominent among them were Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Hari Singh Bhangi, Charhat Singh Sukarchakia, Gujjar Singh Bhangi, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, Baghel Singh

Karorasinghia, and Khushal Singh Faizullapuria, a nephew of Kapur Singh. A contemporary news report from Delhi, dated 11 October 1760, testifies to the 'Sikhs' having 'established their tax collection over the country', which they shared 'with the Shah'.¹⁴

Between 1752 and 1761 the Khalsa were pitted against a victor confident and determined to retain the Punjab. According to Tahmas Khan, an eyewitness, they fought pitched battles with the nominees of Ahmad Shah Abdali, often making it difficult for them to take possession of their charge or administer it. After Ahmad Shah's return to Kabul in 1757, the Singhs nearly overpowered his son who had been left behind to govern the Punjab. After Timur Shah's ouster they recovered their territories. Within months of the battle of Panipat in January 1761, they were able to oust the appointees of Ahmad Shah. He returned early next year to teach a lesson to the Khalsa and surprised them in February 1762 at a place called Kup near Malerkotla. The Afghans surrounded their camp, wounded and killed several leaders and warriors, and massacred thousands of women and children. Their estimated casualties ranged from 10,000 to 30,000. Abdali later attacked Amritsar and blasted the Harmandir with gunpowder.

By the time of the great carnage (*waddhā ghallūghārā*) of February 1762, the fighting bands of the Khalsa had increased manifold since the early 1730s. Tahmas Khan reports that 'nearly one and a half lakh Sikhs, horse and foot' were present at this time.¹⁵ Probably by now they were organized into larger fighting units called *misl*s. Bhangu gives the names of eighteen *misl*s known after the individual leaders, places, special attributes, and social background.¹⁶ The Bedi and Sodhi descendants of Guru Nanak and Guru Ram Das had joined the Khalsa in the 1750s. The leader of the Ahluwalia *misl*, also often of the Dal Khalsa, came from a family of Kalāls (distillers), and the Ramgarhia *misl* was led by a Tarkhān (carpenter) by birth. Compared to one dera led by a Ranghreta in the 1730s, now two units were named after the 'untouchable' Ranghretas and Ramdasias (respectively the Chuhra and Chamar Singhs).

Bhangu says that the Amritsar and Damdama recensions of the Sikh scripture were in the camp at the time of the carnage.¹⁷ As suggested by the *Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama*, the *Guru Granth Sahib* was used for the Khalsa rites of marriage and death; the male child was required to be given the baptism of the double-edged sword and named after consulting the Granth.¹⁸ The scripture must have become an integral part of the life of over a lakh of men, women and children present in the camp at Kup. Above all, the collective decisions of the Khalsa were taken in the presence of the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

The commitment, confidence, and optimism of the Khalsa appear to have enabled them to rally within months of the great carnage. They fought engagements with Ahmad Shah's forces, recovered control of Amritsar, and defeated his nominees. No one dared 'obstruct' or 'oppose' this 'sect of the Guru'—reported the newswriter from Delhi in March–April 1763.¹⁹ Early in 1764 they attacked Sirhind, killed its Afghan governor along with his 10,000 horsemen, sacked the town, and began occupying territories in the plains of Sirhind from the Sutlej to the Yamuna.

Tradition still describes how the Sikhs dispersed as soon as the battle was won, and how, riding day and night, each horseman would throw his belt and scabbard, his articles of dress and accoutrement, until he was almost naked, into successive villages to mark them as his.²⁰

In his expedition of 1764 the victor of Panipat suffered the worst defeat of his career. According to a news report from Delhi, after a pitched engagement with the Khalsa near the Chenab, he had to save himself by 'putting his own horse into the river', and his troops 'fled pellmell, like an army without defence or transport'. In this engagement the

Khalsa had 'more than one lakh horse and foot, with many well-mounted horsemen'. They were 'treated with much awe by the Afghans', noticed another news report.²¹ Qazi Nur Muhammad, who accompanied Ahmad Shah in the following expedition of 1764–65, was constrained to admit that the Afghans had lost the entire country from Sirhind to the Derajat, including Lahore and Multan; it was now being enjoyed by the Singhs 'without fear from anyone'.²²

All through the political struggle of the Khalsa, the Harmandir served as their nerve centre. During their intense conflict with the Afghans in the early 1760s, the Khalsa were reported to be repairing regularly to 'Chak Guru' (Amritsar) for ritual bathing (*ashnān*), and 'deliberation and consultation' before fanning out for territorial occupation. Their confidence appears to have percolated down to the peaceful followers of the Gurus. For the Diwali of 1763 'a very large crowd' was reported to be gathering at the shrine and the construction of the houses around was also under way.²³ Qazi Nur Muhammad saw a connection between the faith of the Khalsa and their exceptional bravery, heroism, and ethics. When Ahmad Shah tried for the last time in 1765 'to destroy the Chak as well as its worshippers', about thirty 'Sikhs' stayed back to 'sacrifice their lives for the Guru'; they engaged 30,000 Afghans in battle, and courted death.²⁴

When Ahmad Shah decided to return to Kabul in March 1765, the Khalsa were the de facto rulers of the Punjab. In April 1765 they struck the 'Sikh coin' at Lahore.²⁵ Sardars Sobha Singh, Gujjar Singh, and Lehna Singh ousted the Afghan nominee from Lahore, occupied the city, and partitioned it amongst themselves. They formally proclaimed Khalsa rule by issuing a coin bearing the following inscription :

*Deg-o tegh-o fateh-o nusrat-i bedirang.
Yāft az Nanak Guru Gobind Singh.*

This was the inscription used by Banda on his seal, acknowledging on behalf of Guru Gobind Singh, the gift of 'bounty, power and instantaneous victory' received from Guru Nanak.²⁶ The Singhs thus succeeded in regaining the state lost by Banda in 1715. Another coin with a similar import was issued from Amritsar in 1778, using this time the inscription used by Banda on a coin :

*Sikka zadd bar har do 'ālam, tegh-i Nanak wāhib ast.
Fateh-i Gobind Singh, Shāh-i Shāhān, fazl-i Sachchā Sāhib ast.*

The sword of Nanak was seen as the bestower (of spiritual and temporal sovereignty) when the coin was struck in the two worlds. The victory of Gobind Singh, 'King of Kings', was due to the grace of the 'True Lord'.²⁷ Popularly known as 'Gobind Shahi' and 'Nanak Shahi' respectively, these coins remained current in the Sikh territories to the north of the Sutlej.²⁸

It is possible to see in retrospect that the doctrines of Guru-Panth and Guru-Granth provided the framework for cohesion, mutual support and restraint during the most intense phase of political struggle from 1748 to 1765. Acting on the belief that the Guru was present among them, the Singhs collectively worked out the strategies, tactics, military organization, and, eventually, the direction and division of conquests. Their collective decisions on issues of common concern enjoyed a sanctity and acceptability even among those who were not present on the occasion. The cohesive devices thus evolved came to be known as *gurmata*, Sarbat Khalsa, Dal Khalsa, and *rākhī*.

Literally a resolution passed in the presence of the Guru, the *gurmata* was a decision taken with common consent in a council of war or a gathering (*diwān*). In a state of warfare a collective decision, often called simply the *matā*, did not necessarily have to be taken in the

presence of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The voluntary gatherings of Singhs, generally at the Akal Takht at Amritsar on the occasions of the Baisakhi and Diwali, came to be known as the Sarbat Khalsa. Every member present in theory had the right to participate in deliberations having a bearing on the common interests of the Khalsa. The collective decisions related to political and military activity, religious matters, and territorial occupation. The gurmata and the Sarbat Khalsa were the two sides of the same political coin. When the fighting units (misls) of several leaders voluntarily combined for joint action under the overall command of one of themselves it was called the Dal Khalsa. This was a temporary combination of several misls for a specific purpose, though the successive invasions of Abdali accounted for the frequency of joint action, often under Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. The rākhī denoted an offer of protection given to a village or villages against the other claimants of land revenue, subject to the payment of a part of the revenue payable. Often the area coming under the rākhī of an individual Singh later came under his regular occupation, and the other members of the Khalsa respected his prior claim over such an area. In fact, according to Bhangu, a gurmata passed at the Akal Takht recognized an individual Singh's right to keep and administer the territory first acquired by him even if it happened to be a village or two.²⁹ Together, the gurmata, the Sarbat Khalsa, the Dal Khalsa, and the rākhī covered different aspects of a state of war up to the point of the conquest of territories.

The principle of equality extended to the socio-political sphere by Guru Gobind Singh through the institution of the Khalsa enabled the individual Singh to participate in these collective enterprises irrespective of his birth or social background. What seemed to matter was that he was steadfast in his faith and observances (rahit), and in the willingness to make sacrifices. He had the right to counsel, to fight, and to a share in the conquests in proportion to his military contribution. After a conjoint conquest, the conquered territory was parcelled out not only among the leaders, but also among their associates down to the individual horseman. In recognition of the leader's prowess and role, his share was accepted to be much larger. Joint conquests and partitioning of villages, *tappas*, parganas, towns, and cities went side by side. Lahore and Qasur were partitioned in this manner, but because of the special importance of Amritsar for the Khalsa, Amritsar came to have a dozen *katras* (quarters) belonging to different Sardars, each administering his katra independently of others. Let alone the leader even a co-sharer in a joint conquest (*pattīdār*) could exercise full authority in the territory falling in his share, thus realizing the belief in the prophecy that every horseman would be a ruler. Following the customary law of inheritance, he could bequeath his share in the revenues to his sons, and failing them, to widows and even daughters. Out of this situation some of the *pattīdārs* and Sardars of the late eighteenth century arose as sovereign rulers.

III

Neither the stereotype of the twelve misls nor that of the *misldārī* system carries much significance for the late eighteenth-century Sikh polity.³⁰ According to the historian Ahmad Shah, there were more than 400 to 500 Sardars in full possession of their territories, but only a few prominent groups.³¹ A few outstanding individuals with the initial advantages of the wider acceptance of their leadership, greater military resources, and larger share of territories appear to have emerged by the late 1760s. Thus, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia set up his headquarters at Kapurthala, Hari Singh Bhangi and later Ganda Singh Bhangi at Amritsar, Jai Singh Kanhiya at Batala, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia at Sri Hargobindpur, Charhat

Singh Sukarchakia at Gujranwala, and Gujjar Singh Bhangi at Gujrat in the Chaj doāb. Their possessions are estimated to have yielded 700,000 to 1,300,000 rupees annually, and they could muster 5,000 to 10,000 horsemen each. Then there were several Sardars of lesser consequence, like Khushal Singh Faizullapuria at Jalandhar, Baghel Singh Karorasinghia at Hoshiarpur, Tara Singh Dallewalia at Rahon, and Milkha Singh Thehpuria at Rawalpindi. While exercising autonomy within his own possessions, each conquerer tended to augment territories at the cost of the past partners and neighbours.

The individual effort and initiative was at full play in the tussle for aggrandizement and supremacy, which is reported to have started between Charhat Singh Sukarchakia and Hari Singh Bhangi even before the occupation of Lahore in 1765.³² Subsequently, in the absence of serious external threat from the Afghans or Marathas, the struggle for ascendancy was as logical as the conquest and partitioning of territories earlier. Since the resources of the prominent Sardars were broadly at par, they had to seek allies. The pattern of alignments and rivalries was inversely related to the pattern of joint conquests. The former allies who held neighbouring territories could range on opposite sides: the Kanhiyas fought with the Ramgarhias, and the Ramgarhias with the Ahluwalias. The Sukarchakias remained the rivals of the Bhangis. The contenders often sought support from the relatively distant Sardars or even the past partners. The latter joined on voluntary basis, sometimes switching sides in the middle of a conflict.³³ By the 1790s death had removed nearly all the veterans from the scene except Jassa Singh Ramgarhia. Some promising rulers of the second generation, like Gurbakhsh Singh Kanhiya and Mahan Singh Sukarchakia, were no more. A fresh spurt of Afghan invasions enabled Mahan Singh's son, Ranjit Singh, to occupy Lahore in 1799, which brought him to the centre stage of regional politics.

Within a decade Ranjit Singh succeeded in unifying the disparate centres of power created by the Sikhs. He ousted the Bhangi Sardars of Amritsar and Gujrat, and neutralized the Ramgarhias with support from the Kanhiyas and the Ahluwalias. By 1810 all the small and big Sardars to the north of the Sutlej felt obliged to submit to him as vassals or enter his service as jāgīrdārs or be content with subsistence jāgīrs. Sada Kaur Kanhiya and Fateh Singh Ahluwalia, his allies of many conquests, too became virtually subordinate to Ranjit Singh, in due course losing their territories in the Bari doāb to him. His attempts during 1806–8 at the subjugation of the Sutlej–Yamuna divide, particularly the major Sikh principalities of Patiala, Nabha, and Jind, were thwarted by the British who obliged him to enter into a 'treaty of friendship' with them at Amritsar in 1809. The Sutlej became the southern boundary of Ranjit Singh's territories, but he could expand in other directions. By 1819 Ranjit Singh had subverted the non-Sikh rulers of the plains and hills, and wrested Attock, Multan, and Kashmir from the Afghans. He established suzerainty over Peshawar and the trans-Indus areas in the early 1820s, and annexed these in the 1830s. Stretching across the plains and hills of north-western India, Ranjit Singh's state acquired the dimensions of an empire.

Yet, ideologically, Ranjit Singh remained akin to his Singh predecessors in regarding sovereignty as a gift rather than a right. Like them he continued with Banda's coin attributing victory to the Gurus and ultimately to the grace of God. Since the sovereignty of Ranjit Singh and his predecessors was not derived from a temporal authority, it could be presumed to have been vested in the collectivity or the Khalsa Panth: the individual ruler styled himself as 'Khalsa Ji' or 'Singh Sahib' and used the phrase '*Akāl Sahai*', 'God the Helper', on his seal. In deference to the doctrine of Guru-Panth, he neither assumed regal titles, nor sat on a throne, nor used any elaborate ceremonial at his court. Compared to the weakest of the Mughals in the mid-eighteenth century, the court (*darul*) of

the strongest of the Sikh rulers was an informal affair. It is not surprising that in his orders Ranjit Singh was often referred to as '*sarkār-i wāla*'. The epithet '*sarkār khālsa jī*' too referred to Ranjit Singh as much as to the mystical entity ruling in the name of the collectivity.³⁴ Nevertheless, by continuing to issue the Nanak Shahi coin he was asserting his sovereign status in temporal affairs. In this, he was no different from his predecessors. 'The derivation of sovereignty from Gurus and God enabled each individual to assert his independence of any temporal lord. For all practical purposes, the individual chief became a sovereign ruler not in spite of the coin but because of it.'³⁵

In fact, in the absence of external threat by the Parbji 1770s, the framework within which the collectivity had been operating, that is, the Sarbat Khalsa, gurmatā, and the Dal Khalsa, had lost its relevance. The new rulers jealously guarded their autonomy and did not allow any one to interfere in their government and administration. The growing importance of the doctrine of Guru-Granth in the Khalsa raj was reflected in the place of worship (*dharmśāl*) acquiring centrality in the life of the Sikhs. As the locus of the scripture (*Granth*) and the corporate body (Panth), the *dharmśāl* came to be called gurdwara.³⁶ In the 1770s the Harmandir was collectively rebuilt finally by the new rulers under perhaps the overall supervision of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia.³⁷ Several new gurdwaras associated with the Gurus and the martyrs also came up, with the *Guru Granth Sahib* installed therein for worship. As a member of the community of believers, the individual ruler paid obeisance to the Granth and listened to it sitting on the floor. Equality before the Granth as the Guru could easily coexist with the individual as the source of de facto power. Notwithstanding deference to the principle of equality within the gurdwara, life outside its precincts was marked by inequalities in power, wealth, and status, arisen over a period of two or three generations. In fact, one of the common measures of piety, economic differentiation, and political eminence among the Sikhs was the amount of revenues alienated to the Harmandir and the other gurdwaras. The gold-plating of the Harmandir by Ranjit Singh in the 1820s as much was an eloquent expression of his devotion to this central shrine of the Sikhs as of his pre-eminent position among them.

With the passage of time, exalted titles came to be used for Ranjit Singh. The plaque on the door frame of the Golden Temple, which was inscribed in 1830, has the title 'Maharaja' for Ranjit Singh.³⁸ He had allowed himself to be addressed as 'Maharaja', but there is no credible basis for the belief held in some quarters that he was coronated formally in 1801 as the 'Maharaja'.³⁹ His extant orders use the Persian epithets like '*huzūr-i wāla*' ('His Exalted Presence').⁴⁰ The treaties with the British signed in 1806 and 1809 refer to him as 'Sardar' and 'Raja' respectively; it was only in the 1830s that the title 'Maharaja' was used by the British for Ranjit Singh.⁴¹ The gun 'Ram Ban', especially inscribed for him in this decade, calls him '*maharaja-dhirāj*'.⁴² Further more, assuming the position of 'an overlord, Ranjit Singh confirmed the Rajput vassals in the hills; created new rajas among the Rajputs; and established matrimonial ties with them. By bestowing the title of 'Rāja-i Rājgān Rāja-i Kalān Bahādur' upon Dhian Singh, the Dogra, and by according the title of 'raja' and a special status to his son Hira Singh, Ranjit Singh created an hierarchy among his vassals and nobles. He virtually appointed a prime minister.

However, in terms of its ethos, the state of Ranjit Singh was akin to the Sikh polity during the late eighteenth century. A broad continuity of policies and measures, and also of ideological underpinnings, can be discerned particularly in the upper doābs between the Sutlej and the Chenab. This area remained under sovereign Sikh rule for the longest period, that is since 1765 when the Gobind Shahi coin was struck at Lahore, and constituted the core region of the Khalsa raj.

IV

The new rulers continued to follow some of the administrative practices of the Mughals. The earliest available administrative order of an emergent ruler going back to 1752 is emphatic that 'the old practice' should not be disturbed.⁴³ With the passage of time conformity with the Mughal politico-administrative structure became increasingly marked. The administrative apparatus was geared essentially to the interrelated functions of revenue collection, administration of justice, and maintenance of law and order, often with military power. Charitable grants were the mode through which the state returned a part of its income to a section of its subjects. Whatever the ultimate source of authority, the rulers exercised *de facto* power within their own territories. The more powerful among them exercised political control over other chiefs, reducing them to vassalage.

For civil and revenue administration, the dominions of Ranjit Singh were divided into a number of primary units. Diwan Dina Nath is reported to have mentioned seven 'great districts' in the dominions of Ranjit Singh: Kashmir, Multan, Peshawar, Kangra, Jalandhar Doab, Wazirabad, and Pind Dadan Khan.⁴⁴ However, there are references to some other primary units in contemporary records: Jhang, Majha (Lahore and Amritsar districts), Hazara, Bannu, Kohat, Dera Ghazi Khan, and Dera Ismail Khan.⁴⁵ The person appointed to administer a primary unit was generally called *nāzim*. He was directly responsible to the sovereign, and held office in accordance with his pleasure. There was no fixed tenure of his office and no regular pattern appears to emerge from the actual appointments of *nāzims* made by Ranjit Singh and his successors.

The *nāzim* was allowed to wield considerable powers in the territory under his jurisdiction. His primary duty was to maintain peace and order in his territory and to submit regular instalments of revenue to the royal treasury.⁴⁶ Ranjit Singh was extremely vigilant and exercised strict control over the *nāzims*. His frequent instructions to the *nāzims* and other officials that the subject people were to be regarded as a 'trust from God' become all the more significant for his alacrity in taking action against all those who disregarded his instructions.⁴⁷ The *nāzims* who enjoyed long terms of office were generally considered among the best: Desa Singh Majithia in Kangra, Lehna Singh Majithia in Kangra and the Majha, Misar Rup Lal in the Jalandhar doāb, Mihan Singh in Kashmir, Hari Singh Nalwa in Hazara, and Diwan Sawan Mal in Multan. In the words of Ganesh Das, Diwan Sawan Mal 'handled the revenue affairs of Multan with commendable ability, brought the country under cultivation, made the people contented and happy and submitted larger revenues to the royal treasury than any of the former functionaries'.⁴⁸ It may, however, be added that short terms of office did not necessarily imply bad administration. General Ventura in Dera Ghazi Khan and Amar Singh Majithia in Hazara present two more examples of 'good' administrators who did not enjoy long terms of office.⁴⁹ Sometimes the *nāzims* were allowed to administer their territories through a deputy or a *mukhtār-i kār*. The *nāzims* generally had their diwans, and their accounts were checked from time to time by the central diwan on the basis of records kept in the central office (*daftar-i mu'allā*) at Lahore.⁵⁰

The names of the known *nāzims* of the various provinces of the kingdom of Lahore make an interesting list: Sardar Atar Singh, Diwan Hakim Rai, Jahan Dad Khan, Yar Muhammad Khan, General Avitabile, Sardar Tej Singh, Sardar Desa Singh Majithia, Sardar Lehna Singh Majithia, Diwan Muhkam Chand, Diwan Moti Ram, Faqir Nuruddin, Misar Rup Lal, Shaikh Ghulam Muhiyuddin, Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, Diwan Kirpa Ram, Misar Diwan Chand, Chuni Lal, Bhamma Singh, Prince Sher Singh, Colonel Mihan Singh, Shaikh Imamuddin, Misar Sukh Dayal, Sham Singh Peshawaria, Jawahar Mal, Hazan Badan Singh.

Diwan Sawan Mal, and Diwan Mul Raj. They were Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians; they were Punjabis, non-Punjabi Indians, and Europeans; they were Jats, Khattris, Brahmans, Saiyids and Shaikhs.

The administrative unit next to the province was the pargana. There are frequent references to the pargana as a territorial unit in contemporary sources. In the *Dastūr al-Amal-i Kashmir* thirty-six parganas are enumerated.⁵¹ The majority of these names are the same as given in the *Āin-i Akbarī*. Ganesh Das generally uses the term pargana for the administrative units into which the doābs of the Punjab were divided.⁵² In the orders issued by chiefs like Hakumat Singh, Sada Kaur, and Tara Singh, the term used for the territorial units of Kahnuwan, Pathankot, Bianpur, and Batala is pargana.⁵³

The term *ta'alluqa*, which came into wide currency during the Sikh times, was only another name for the unit called pargana. In the orders of Sada Kaur, Prince Kharak Singh, Moti Ram, and Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the term *ta'alluqa* is used for Talibpur, Manawar, Awankh, Gharo-Batala, and Bianpur.⁵⁴ In the case of Bianpur both the terms pargana and *ta'alluqa* are used by the same ruler. It is interesting to note, indeed, that Bute Shah shows his preference for the term *ta'alluqa* and Ahmad Shah for the term pargana.⁵⁵ The *Khalsa Darbar Records* leave no doubt about the interchangeability of the pargana and the *ta'alluqa*.⁵⁶

The subdivision of the pargana or *ta'alluqa* during the Sikh times was the tappa. In the *Chār Bāgh-i Panjab*, for example, it is stated that the pargana of Pharwala had four tappas and Dangli had eight; Rohtas had four tappas; Gujrat and Shahjahanpur had eight each; Herat and Bahlolpur had seven each; Shaikhupura had eight tappas; and Batala had four. According to some early British settlement reports, Chhachh and Pothuhar in the Sindh Sagar Doab were divided respectively into four and eight tappas. According to another report, Peshawar was divided into five tappas; Bannu into twenty. There are references to tappas also in the Kangra hills and, across the river Satlej, in the pargana of Baddowal. Tappa as a fiscal unit had existed during the Mughal times.⁵⁷ Its survival in many a pargana or *ta'alluqa* of the Sikh times is easily understandable.

The term *āmīl* for the official in charge of a pargana or a *ta'alluqa* remained in use in the early eighteenth century.⁵⁸ More frequently, however, the term *kārdār*, denoting the person in-charge, was used for the officials appointed to administer these secondary units.⁵⁹ The word *kārdār* was not confined to the *ta'alluqa* official; it was used for the officials employed by the *nāzims*, the princes, and the *jāgīrdārs*.⁶⁰ It was used by contemporaries also for the administrators of towns and even *katras*;⁶¹ for the managers of salt markets, and for the officials of customs.⁶² Nevertheless, it was used most frequently for the persons appointed to look after the administration of *ta'alluqas* or parganas.

The *kārdār* was generally appointed by the ruler and normally had to submit a formal deed of acceptance.⁶³ There was no fixed tenure of the *kārdār*. What was expected from him is indicated by an order of Ranjit Singh issued to Chaudhari Kanhiya who was appointed to the *ta'alluqa* of Bhimbar with effect from the *kharīf* crop of 1837. His first task was to take accounts of the *kharīf* crop of 1836 and the *rabī'* crop of 1837 from the former *kārdār* of that *ta'alluqa*, and to keep with him the sums thus realized. He was asked to collect the revenues of the *kharīf* crop of 1837 and to assess the revenues for the *rabī'* crop of 1838. He was instructed to keep in view the increase in revenues and in agriculture, and to be upright and sympathetic in dealing with the people, keeping their well-being at heart. He was also instructed not to decide any important suits without getting Ranjit Singh's approval.⁶⁴

Instructions issued to *kārdārs* by Diwan Sawan Mal clarify the duties that every *kārdār* in Multan was expected to perform.⁶⁵ He was expected to extend cultivation and increase

revenues, to see that canals were cleared and excavated in time, to appraise or divide crops, and to assess the revenue in consultation with the village headmen. He was instructed to send a list of the current prices signed by the village headmen and the zamīndārs on the first of Har every year. And in the month of Bhadon every year he was expected to go to Multan in order to settle his accounts. He was asked to send the revenue punctually in six instalments, three each for the kharīf and the rabī'. He was expected to protect the people of the ta'alluqa against thieves and other criminals. The culprits were to be put under detention by the kārdār and orders of imprisonment and fines were to be given in due course by the nāzim. The kārdār was instructed to pay the soldiers personally and in accordance with the fixed scales.⁶⁶

The kārdār was primarily a fiscal officer and his most important duty was to collect revenue. He used to keep proper record of the collections made and the expenditure incurred. All orders relating to payment of cash or alienation of revenues in favour of individuals were preserved by the kārdār, and receipts or acknowledgments of the payments made by him were also maintained.⁶⁷ In the case of orders of revenue-free grants in which places were left unspecified, the kārdār used his discretion to specify a suitable area.⁶⁸ He was sometimes asked to remit stipulated amounts to commandants and thānadārs for disbursement among the troops.⁶⁹ The accounts of the kārdār were regularly audited. A defaulting kārdār was liable to fine, imprisonment, confiscation of property, transfer, or dismissal, depending upon the seriousness of the case.⁷⁰

No kārdār as a rule was allowed to serve at one place for a long time. Several cases of the transfer of kārdārs are given in the *Khalsa Darbar Records*.⁷¹ Occasionally, a kārdār was transferred on a complaint from the zamīndārs. Much more frequently, however, the kārdārs were transferred from one place to another as a matter of policy. Therefore, a single person served as a kārdār in several different places at different times.⁷² Ganesh Das gives a very interesting list of the administrators of Gujrat and, on the basis of this information, the average stay of a kārdār comes to nearly two and a half years.⁷³

The salary of the kārdār was broadly in proportion to the annual net value of the area under his charge.⁷⁴ Gauhar Mal, who was getting 2,400 rupees a year at one time, was holding ten ta'alluqas. Ganda Mal, who was getting 360 rupees a year, was holding only nine villages. Though the salary of the kārdār ranged from 150 to 2,500 rupees, the majority of the kārdārs received something between 500 and 1,000 rupees a year. It may be added that some of the kārdārs were paid through jāgīrs, which were resumed on their transfer, presumably because they were given fresh jāgīrs in the ta'alluqas to which they were sent.⁷⁵

Unlike the kārdār, the qānūngo performed his functions in the ta'alluqa more or less permanently. During Mughal times originally there used to be one qānūngo for a pargana, but in the reign of Aurangzeb the number of qānūngos had considerably increased, and more than one qānūngo could be appointed in a pargana.⁷⁶ Many of the old families of qānūngos continued to hold office during the Sikh times. Ganesh Das, for example, mentions old families of Khatri, including his own, which held the office of the qānūngo in Rohtas, Bahlolpur, Takht Hazara, Gujrat, Herat, Sialkot, Pathankot, Batala, and Kalanaur.⁷⁷ Also, more than one qānūngo was in many cases appointed to a pargana or a ta'alluqa. For example, Bedi and Mehta Khatri were the qānūngos of Haibatpur Patti, and the qanungoi of Jalandhar belonged to Sehgal and Thapars.⁷⁸ In Wazirabad a Brahman named Jai Singh was appointed qānūngo by Jodh Singh, while Sahni Khatri continued to hold qanungoi as of old.⁷⁹ In the documents of the *Bhandari Collection* in the Punjab State Archives there is ample evidence that four or five qānūngos held office at one and the same time in the

pargana of Batala during the Sikh times. The number of Muslim qānūngos had increased during the reign of Aurangzeb. It is difficult to know their proportion in the Sikh times, but their existence is beyond any doubt.⁸⁰

The qānūngo was indispensable for the revenue administration at the secondary level. He was the chief source of reliable information relating to area statistics, local revenue rates, revenue receipts, and practices of the ta'alluqa or the pargana. As a survival from the Mughal times, his office provided probably the strongest link between the old and the new.⁸¹ In the Mughal times the qānūngo was generally paid 2 per cent of the collections made from the area under his jurisdiction. In the Sikh times he was paid either a certain percentage of the produce or in cash at 30 rupees a month.⁸² In the *Khalsa Darbar Records* there are references also to the grant of revenue-free land to qānūngos.⁸³ In an order of Ranjit Singh there is reference to the customary dues of qānūngoi and also to *sawāi*, or an additional fourth part, besides and one seer per maund of the produce.⁸⁴

Like the qānūngo, the chaudharī and the *muqaddam* occupied extremely important positions in the machinery of revenue collection. According to one revenue manual, whereas in the Mughal times chaudharāi had been generally hereditary, in the Sikh times preference was given to competent nephews over incompetent sons of a deceased chaudharī.⁸⁵ Each pargana or ta'alluqa was divided into a number of tappas, and in each tappa a chaudharī was appointed for the purpose of revenue collection.⁸⁶ The hereditary heads of tappas in the Bannu region were called maliks, and the term generally used for them in the Peshawar area was arbāb.⁸⁷ The muqaddam on the other hand was generally appointed for a single village. In fact, more than one muqaddam (or *lambardār* or panch) could be found at places in a single village for each of its major subdivisions, generally known as *tarafs* or *pattīs*.⁸⁸

Chaudharīs and muqaddams were generally given revenue-free lands for the purpose of extending cultivation either directly or through the zamīndārs of the village. Such grants of revenue-free land in Gurdaspur were given not only in the time of Ranjit Singh, but also earlier by Jai Singh Kanhiya, Gurbakhsh Singh, Fateh Singh, Hakumat Singh, and Nidhan Singh Randhawa.⁸⁹ There are frequent references in the early British records to *in'āms* 'formerly held' by panchas and lambardārs.⁹⁰ This finds ample confirmation from the *Khalsa Darbar Records*. The chaudharīs of Merowal, for example, held revenue-free lands in four villages, and one of these grants had been originally given by the chief named Dal Singh to Jaffar Khan of Merowal in 1780.⁹¹ Ranjit Singh confirmed several such grants to Chaudhari Khudayar in Jalalpur, Chaudhari Tek Chand Hundal in Hallowal, Chaudhari Qadir Bakhsh Kahlon in Zafarwal, Chaudhari Shadi Khan in Malikpur, Chaudhari Suba Khan in Qila Suba Singh, Chaudhari Ghulam Qadir in Wazirabad, and Chaudhari Fattu in Zafarwal, for example.⁹² The *in'āms* given to chaudharīs and muqaddams were not collected by the grantee from the village in excess of the government demand, but were deducted from it so that the claim was upon the government and not upon the peasant proprietors.⁹³

Chaudharīs and muqaddams generally received a certain percentage of the revenues collected. There are references in the *Khalsa Darbar Records* to *pachotrā*, or 5 per cent (commission), received by the chaudharīs and others.⁹⁴ An order of Jai Singh Kanhiya shows that a chaudharī named Mian Khan used to get not only 5 per cent commission, two seers per maund, and 100 rupees in cash, but also revenue-free land measuring 160 ghumāons.⁹⁵

As old as the chaudharī and the muqaddam was the patwārī, whose primary duty was to maintain revenue records for every village under his jurisdiction. It is generally believed, probably on the basis of Abul Fazl's statement in the *Āin-i Akbarī*, that every village had a patwārī to record its expenditure and income. What Abul Fazl says, however, is that there was no village without a patwārī, which leaves the possibility of one patwārī keeping the

records of more than one village.⁸⁸ During the Sikh times in any case, there was hardly a village which had a patwari entirely for itself. In the Majha, for example, clusters of three to six or eight villages were formed into tappas and a single patwari looked after the records of each of these tappas.⁸⁹ In Gujranwala, on an average, nearly five villages were covered by a single patwari.⁹⁰ The customary remuneration of the patwari ranged from 1 to 2 per cent of the collections made from the villages under his jurisdiction.⁹¹

The smallest unit of area in revenue administration was, of course, the village (*mauza*). Its boundaries were usually marked and entered in revenue records. Its lands consisted of two main parts: habitation and agricultural. This is not to suggest, however, that no wastelands or pastures or ponds were attached to the village. Even agricultural land was classified into various categories. This description of the village appears to hold good for the majority of villages in the Sikh dominions. It must be pointed out, however, that in some areas isolated wells as small units were grouped together to form one larger fiscal unit.

The broad administrative framework did not undergo any substantial change during the period of Sikh rule. The units of revenue administration remained the same. The province, the pargana, the tappa and the village are as much in evidence during the Sikh times as in the Mughal. The administrators also were the same. The *nāzim* or the *subadār*, the *kārdār* as the counterpart of the Mughal *āmil*, the *qanungo*, the *chaudharī*, the *muqaddam*, and the *patwārī* provided the machinery of administration now as before. However, the number of primary divisions and, consequently, the number of *nāzims*, the number of *parganas* and, therefore, the number of *kārdārs* increased during the Sikh times. Obviously, the size of these units and the importance of those who administered them decreased. These changes did introduce a difference, but a difference of degree. It is the essential continuum in the administrative framework that is striking despite a 'political revolution'.

V

The broad similarity of the politico-administrative structure of the kingdom of Lahore with that of the Mughal empire does not mean that religious ideology had no bearing on the new states, including the kingdom of Lahore. The Sikh rulers and their *jāgirdars* extended lavish patronage to Sikh institutions and individuals. The historic gurdwaras, especially the Harmandir at Amritsar, received extensive revenue-free lands. Among individuals, the Sodhi and Bedi descendants of Guru Ram Das and Guru Nanak received the largest amount of revenues. Even the Udasis or an order of the renunciants, who were on the periphery of the Sikh Panth, but who had become the custodians of most of the gurdwaras and had their own *deras*, were amongst the largest recipients of state patronage. These charitable grants may be seen as expressions of thanksgiving for the gift of rulership and also as a way of sharing the benefits of the newly acquired political power. It may be underlined that through these grants the orthodoxy in general, including the Nihangs, were harnessed in support of the political order as custodians of shrines, as warriors, and also as mediators between contending parties. It must be added that this patronage did not affect the position of non-Sikh institutions and individuals as noticed later in this essay.

The Sikh rulers were particular about justice. The first duty of the ruler in much of the Sikh literature from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century is to administer justice. The *raison d'être* for the political struggle of the Sikhs was the reinstatement of justice and protection against oppression, which was implicit in the idea of '*sajug*'. There was to be no discrimination on grounds of religion. It was the moral obligation of the individual ruler

(*dharam-i Khālṣa Jio*) to honour an earlier commitment, as much his own as that of his predecessors. The available admonitory orders of the Sikh rulers underline their concern to protect ordinary subjects and men of piety against the high-handedness of administrators, *jāgīrdārs*, *zamīndārs*, and soldiers.¹⁰⁰ The tone and content of these orders suggest that, consciously or unconsciously, the Sikh rulers were trying to exercise power with moderation and mildness. This was reminiscent of the *halemī rāj* (from the Persian *halīmī* or mild) established by the fifth Guru Arjan at Ramdasapur (Amritsar):

Through the Will of the Merciful Lord
None is oppressed by another, and everyone lives in comfort.
Thus has been established the rule by mildness.¹⁰¹

The administration of justice under Sikh rulers, therefore, *raj* was informed by the Sikh Gurus' resistance to injustice and oppression. Their followers had waged a determined struggle against injustice, and after coming into power even the most powerful of them did not regard himself, his sons, and the highest among his nobles as above justice. Any 'inappropriate order' or 'inappropriate act' on their part was to be brought to Ranjit Singh's notice, as stated explicitly in his available orders of 1825 and 1831, addressed to Faqir Nuruddin. The order of 1831 further instructs him as the administrator of Lahore:

You should not permit forcible possession to be taken of any person's land or any person's house to be demolished. Nor should you allow any high-handedness to be practised upon wood-cutters, fodder-vendors, oil-vendors, horse-shoers, and owners of manufactories etc. In such cases also you should prevent the oppressor from oppression.¹⁰²

Accessibility to justice and plurality of agencies dispensing it went together. Wherever in operation, the existing sources of justice were retained and recognized: the *qāzīs'* courts, the mohalla and caste panchāyats in towns, and the committees of elders in villages. The early British administrators particularly testify to the efficacy and credibility of the village panchāyats in the region. In addition, whether a *pattīdār* or a chief, the new ruler himself administered justice and, depending upon the size of his territories, also entrusted this responsibility to others. With the unification of Sikh territories under Ranjit Singh, provincial governors (*nāzims*), local administrators (*kārdārs*), and large *jāgīrdārs* were added to the agencies of justice. Ranjit Singh appointed *adāltīs* or mobile justices.¹⁰³ In all probability, they functioned in the rural areas of the upper doābs. Besides custom, the sources of law included the shastras and the sharia 'as pertinent to the faith of the parties'.¹⁰⁴ No discrimination appears to have been made between the parties 'on grounds of religion'.¹⁰⁵ The available legal documents establish that in matters of property transactions non-Muslims also resorted to the *qāzī's* courts.¹⁰⁶

A striking aspect of the administration of justice was the leniency of punishments. Murders and even cases of gross insubordination in the army were punished with fines, deductions in salary, and demotions.¹⁰⁷ A Purbia soldier convicted of murder was exiled across the Sutlej with his face blackened.¹⁰⁸ Even in the case of an attempt on his own life, Ranjit Singh allowed the culprit to get away with his life. Passing through the Punjab in the early 1830s, Alexander Burnes observed that Ranjit Singh had 'never been keen to punish a criminal with death since his accession to power'.¹⁰⁹ Capital punishment was virtually non-existent as an accepted feature of the judicial system in the upper doābs.

In the world-view of the Khalsa, provision of justice was incomplete without extending the freedom of belief and worship to all. The new rulers took the age-old institution of

religious charity (*dharmarth*) and revenue grants (*madad-i ma'āsh*) to a new height, reached perhaps nowhere else in India. They scrupulously confirmed thousands of charitable grants enjoyed by mosques, *khānqāhs*, *takias*, temples, religious *deras* and *gaddīs*. In one of his orders an early ruler explicitly states: 'Few have known this truth that by the grace of the True Guru, there is no discrimination.'¹¹⁰ Several other Sardars, and later Ranjit Singh, echo this sentiment. Their quarrel had been with the then state and not with the faith of its rulers or the majority of its functionaries. Therefore, as the new rulers settled down, they also gave fresh grants to Islamic places of worship and individual Pirzadas, Saiyids, Shaikhs and qazis. A large number of temples, Vaishnava and Jogi establishments, cowsheds, and Brahmans received fresh grants by way of charity.

Thus, compared to the broad proportion of the total revenues alienated by Akbar in the upper doabs as *madad-i ma'āsh*, the proportion of the total revenues given away as *dharmarth* in broadly the same area by Ranjit Singh was nearly four times. As under the Mughals, the recipients of charities were expected to 'pray' for the donor and thus quietly lend support to the new regime. Cumulatively, however, the charitable grants to Sikhs and non-Sikhs may be taken as expressions of piety and catholicity built into the Khalsa ideology.

Accommodation to the existing foci of power in the region, both Sikh and non-Sikh, was implicit in the policy of moderation. Like his predecessors, Ranjit Singh allowed the descendants of erstwhile partners-in-conquest (*pattīdārs*), sometimes even their widows or daughters, to continue holding their villages on terms of furnishing horsemen and payment of a token tribute (*nazrāna*). The descendants of the *misdārs*, or leaders of bands of horsemen, were generally allowed to remain in autonomous possession of their territories on terms of maintaining contingents. In the process of reducing the Sikh rulers to subordination, military support and the payment of *nazrāna* were generally demanded. In their case Ranjit Singh appears not to have insisted upon all the conditions of vassalage. Rather, he showed so much of consideration towards them that the sovereign rulers like Fateh Singh Ahluwalia passed into vassalage almost unobtrusively.¹¹¹ In the case of the Rajput hill chiefs and the Pathans, the terms and conditions of vassalage were more stringent: they were required, among other things, to station their representatives (*vakīls*) and even kin at the court of Ranjit Singh.

When dispossessed, the former rulers were conciliated and accommodated by offers of service. If they did not wish to serve the new state, they could still subsist on the *jāgīrs* given for their maintenance. There is no known instance of a dispossessed ruler or even his *jāgīrdārs* during the entire period of Sikh rule who was not accommodated in this manner. As if by common consensus, the new rulers appear to have felt responsible for the upkeep of the ousted foe or rival and even his dependants. When Ranjit Singh annexed the territories of Sahib Singh Bhangi of Gujrat, his staunch rival, he allowed a pargana to remain with Sahib Singh for his subsistence. Similar consideration was shown to the dispossessed non-Sikh elements in the upper doabs by the early Sikh rulers. Ranjit Singh extended this policy beyond the core region. He gave *jāgīrs* to the families of the ousted rulers of Guler and Nurpur in the hills even when they persisted in their resistance to him. The subsistence *jāgīrs*, however, were gradually reduced or resumed with the passage of time, and certainly after the death of the incumbent. Local leaders in the tribal territories in the Chaj Doab too were similarly reconciled to the new rule through the grant of one-fourth share of the revenues (*chahāram*) of their localities. The process of downward mobility was thus punctuated by accommodation at several levels.

Concern for the peasantry became the cornerstone of the conception of just rule after the Sikh rulers stabilized their position in the areas under their protection (*rakhi*). In

place of the fixed cash assessment based on measurement (*zabt*), which needed more elaborate machinery and fell more heavily on the producer, they allowed the cultivator to opt for crop sharing (*batāī*) and appraisalment of the standing crop (*kankūt*). The system of payments in kind was more favourable to the peasant. Its built-in flexibility enabled the cultivator to adjust better with the vagaries of weather. Wherever the state share was commuted into cash under Ranjit Singh, the conversion rate was determined according to the current prices, with the concurrence of the village headmen and the peasant proprietors. For fixing the revenue payable (*mushakhasa*) in advance, the state increasingly preferred to deal with the heads of villages (*muqaddams*) who were closer to the actual cultivators than with the heads of groups of villages (*chaudharīs*). In the event of natural calamities it was common to give remissions and allow the arrears of revenue to accumulate rather than oblige the cultivator to flee in desperation.

In the reorganization of his army as the instrument of the new regime, Ranjit Singh appears to stand apart from his Sikh and Mughal predecessors. Having initiated the process early in his reign, he entrusted this task to several Frenchmen who joined his service in the 1820s.¹¹² The Westernized sections of his army stayed in cantonments, received cash salaries, and had a regular hierarchy of officers and non-combatants. In its training and drills, uniforms and inspections, and messing and supply it was modelled on the French and the English systems, and yet remained distinct from them. Even the so-called 'irregular' force of Ranjit Singh, which constituted nearly half of his army, consisted of 'a body of active fighters with more or less regimentation and discipline'.¹¹³ In deference to the doctrine of Guru-Granth, however, the regular staff of each unit of both wings included readers of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which was deposited usually near the flagstaff denoting the headquarters of the unit. On the whole, the Western features appear to have harmonized well with the Khalsa tradition and heightened the corporate identity of the army.

In the 1830s the Sikhs constituted about 50 per cent of the men and officers in the artillery, and dominated the other main wings of the army.¹¹⁴ Without slackening discipline, Ranjit Singh evinced a keen interest in all details concerning welfare of the troops.¹¹⁵ He was quick to reward them with promotions and other incentives. It was not uncommon for a trooper to become an officer and even a commander within a few years of joining his service. Where necessary, Ranjit Singh punished the soldiers and officers through fines, deductions, and demotions, resorting to dismissals only in extreme cases. Despite the absence of severe punishments, he was able to create 'the best regulated army' under an Indian ruler, records a contemporary observer.¹¹⁶ Finally, he was also able to nurture in the army a sense of identification with himself, with his state, and with the Khalsa Panth.¹¹⁷

With this background it is not surprising that after Ranjit Singh the army became restive over the quick changes of rulers and prime ministers.¹¹⁸ Wooed by the rulers and ministers, it managed to double its pay and strength, negotiating through its elected panchāyats which sprang up spontaneously in 1841. Its European officers now felt insecure and began to leave. With the assassination of Maharaja Sher Singh and Raja Dhian Singh in 1843, the army assumed a 'political' role, invoking the doctrine of the Guru-Panth. The panchāyats that had been disbanded now resurfaced in every unit of the regular and irregular army to revive collective functioning. The officers were divested of all disciplinary powers, and the elected 'magistrates' called *chaudharīs* were reported to have imposed an 'iron' discipline in each unit. A central panchāyat came into existence to effect coordination among the 'regimental' panchāyats. It called itself 'Panth Khalsa ji' and issued directives to the ruling family, the prime minister, and the military commanders.¹¹⁹ In 1844 Colonel Richmond, the British political agent posted across the Sutlej at Ludhiana, observed:

The Sikhs are still imbued with much of the enthusiasm of the reformers and with much of the activity of mind and resolution of purpose.... They will still dare and endure much for the Khalsa.¹²⁶

It may be safely assumed that the non-Sikh troops raised by Ranjit Singh also were with the Khalsa when it came to a threat to one of his sons or to the stability and integrity of his state. At this stage, even some of the officers and the old Sardars from the upper doābs appear to have sympathized with the Khalsa army, which came to combine elements of social equality, political involvement, and military discipline by consensus. For this brief phase, perhaps during 1844–45, it became in a sense a 'national army'. The high morale of the Khalsa army was in marked contrast with the growing anxiety and demoralization of the ruling class. The wealth accumulated by the individuals and families over the past two or three generations appears to have weakened the resolve of several of them to control the army or to direct political affairs. Those who had the most to lose in power and privileges sought to preserve these by hobnobbing with the British who were now seriously considering conquest of the Punjab. Encouraged but unsupported by the ruling class, and provoked by the British, the army crossed the Sutlej in the name of the Khalsa Panth, and lost the raj it was anxious to preserve.

VI

The formation of a regional polity stretched over almost a century was marked by an unprecedented involvement of the people in the whole process. While all sections of society appear to have been affected by the political process and regionalization of the state, there was much greater integration between the state and the social categories like the ruling class, the religious grantees, the intermediaries, and the peasantry, all of whom interacted with the rulers and administrators in a well-defined context.

The ruling class formed the apex of the social hierarchy as a set of people who exercised certain amount of decision-making power in political, administrative and military spheres at different levels in the government, and shared overwhelmingly in the distribution of the resources of the state. On the basis of the role in the acquisition, maintenance, and exercise of power, the mode of sharing the surplus, and the corresponding lifestyles, it is possible to look upon the ruling class as operating at two levels of the power structure. The princes, ministers, courtiers, provincial governors, and generals and commanders in the army belonged to the primary level, and were paid largely through jāgīrs. Many of them received the titles of raja, sardar and diwan. The thānadār in the fort, the qāzī in the town, the kārdār in the pargana or the ta'alluqa, and the officers in the army could be said to have constituted the secondary level. They generally had a supportive role.

As may be expected a priori, formation of the state by the Sikhs involved a virtual replacement of the Mughal and Afghan ruling class in the late eighteenth century. In the process of unification in the early nineteenth century, many erstwhile rulers and jāgīrdārs were absorbed into the new ruling class. Like the majority of the new rulers of the eighteenth century, their jāgīrdārs were mostly Jat. Nevertheless, non-Jats were also represented among the rulers, and non-Sikhs among the jāgīrdārs, including both Hindus and Muslims. Under Ranjit Singh a few non-Punjabis like Jamadar Khushal Singh and his nephew Tej Singh, and a few Europeans like Ventura and Avitabile were given important positions in the civil administration and the army. Most of the new members were largely from non-aristocratic background; they came from within the dominions of Ranjit Singh, including

the Kangra and Jammu hills. The majority of his important jāgīrdārs belonged to the core region, that is, the Bist Jalandhar, the upper Bari, and the upper Rachna doābs.

According to information available on the jāgīrdārs in the kingdom of Lahore, nearly 60 per cent of them were Sikh, though the Sikhs formed about 10 per cent of the total population. The majority of the Sikh members continued to be Jat, largely from the core region of the state, particularly covered by the later districts of Amritsar, Lahore, Gujranwala, Sialkot, and Gurdaspur. Among the non-Jat Sikhs there were not only Khatri and Brahmans, but also Tarkhans (carpenters), Kalals (distillers), and Nais (barbers) by caste as well as the former outcastes called Mazhabīs. Nearly a fourth of the ruling class was Hindu, which corresponded broadly to their general proportion in the total population. But the majority of them were Khatri and Brahmans from the core region. There were some Saiyids and Pathans at the primary level of the power structure. The most important and most influential of the Muslim members were the Faqir brothers who belonged to Lahore. Thus, we can see hegemony of the core dominions over the outlying territories, and a strong 'Jat-Khatri core' behind that hegemony.¹²¹

At the secondary level of the power structure, however, there was a more striking balance. The Sikh and Hindu adāltīs did not replace the qāzīs. Among the lower-ranking officers in the army, as well as the kārdārs and qānūngos, there was a much larger proportion of Muslims and Hindus. Among the tribal and clan leaders in the south-western and north-western parts of the kingdom it is difficult not to assume that the Muslims were in direct proportion to their general population. By and large, only the powerful leaders of the recalcitrant tribes were divested of power and gradually obliged to relinquish the economic advantages they had formerly enjoyed. Many of them were initially conciliated by the grant of a fourth share of revenues (chahāram), but it was reduced gradually. Their position was similar to that of the ousted Sikh rulers who were given subsistence jāgīrs that went on decreasing with time.

In fact, a process of graduated change is evident in all sections of the old ruling class, particularly among the Sikhs and Hindus. From the position essentially of sovereign rulers, most of the early conquerers among the Sikhs were reduced to the status of vassals. With the exception of Fateh Singh Ahluwalia of Kapurthala, who had territories on both sides of the Sutlej and who was saved by the intervention of the British, the Sikh vassals were generally obliged to accept the position of service jāgīrdārs.¹²² Finally, many of them virtually became pensioners of the kingdom of Lahore, holding jāgīrs for subsistence. On the other hand, the Khatri and Brahman families that had served largely at the secondary levels under the Mughals and the Afghans, improved their position. Under Ranjit Singh quite a few of their members came to hold the highest offices as diwans, treasurers, provincial governors, and generals. It appears, on the whole, that the proportion and importance of the non-Sikhs among the ruling class as well as their privileges increased with the expansion of the kingdom of Lahore.¹²³

Maximum social mobility nevertheless was evident in the case of the Sikhs. According to a contemporary observer, there was 'scarcely a Sikh' who was not a jāgīrdar.¹²⁴ However, we may be sure that most of them were holding petty assignments. Sikh members of the new ruling class enjoyed jāgīrs ranging from 25,000 to over 800,000 rupees. Hari Singh Nalwa emerged in the 1830s as the biggest recipient of the service jāgīr. Descendants of the established Sikh families came to be referred to as the '*qadīm khānazāds*'.¹²⁵ At the same time, the erstwhile chiefs and their jāgīrdārs who had willy-nilly accepted Ranjit Singh's vassalage or service were neutralized by the elevation of his collaterals, companions, troopers, and servants (*khidmatgārs*) to positions of eminence as sardars and jāgīrdārs. The well-

known families of the Sandhanwalia and Majithia Sardars, and Hari Singh Nalwa were amongst them. Towards the end of Ranjit Singh's reign, the majority of his 'principal' nobles, classified in the *Khalsa Darbar Records* as the '*sardārān-i nāmdār*' and '*sardārān-i kalān*', were his own creation.¹²⁶

The privileges enjoyed by the new ruling class appear to have sharpened the lines of distinction by the end of our period. With a view perhaps to motivating and involving a large number of people in the interests of the state, Ranjit Singh had rewarded the new members of the ruling class rather generously. The large *jāgīrs* held, for example, by the Dogra brothers, the Sandhanwalia Sardars, Hari Singh Nalwa, and Tej Singh, set the standard of acquisitiveness and display of wealth for others. A sizeable proportion of the income of the new ruling class was spent on conspicuous consumption, which appears to have been connected also with their quest for prestige. In fact, Ranjit Singh himself encouraged them to support the splendour and dignity of his court by the appropriate lifestyle and ceremonial.¹²⁷ They lived in large fort-like mansions; adorned themselves with silks and jewels; spent lavishly on social ceremonies and festivals; constructed buildings, *bāolīs*, and gardens; patronized artists, musicians, and dancers; and, above all, patronized Brahmans and tolerated or even observed Brahmanical rituals. Many of them also emulated the ruler in his extensive religious charities.

As we noticed earlier, the general policy of Ranjit Singh, like that of the early Sikh rulers, was to confirm the charitable grants coming down from the earlier times and make fresh ones to all faiths in their dominions. In this, Ranjit Singh was followed by the Sikh and non-Sikh *jāgīrdārs*. Consequently, nearly all the important religious establishments and men of piety not only continued to enjoy the existing privileges, but also received fresh grants. Individuals and institutions belonging to the Sikh faith, however, received the largest amount of *dharmarth* grants during this period. Area for area, even if the grants given to the Sikhs are excluded, the number of the recipients of charity seems to have increased by the end of Ranjit Singh's reign. All categories of religious grantees represented vested interests that commanded influence with the people and provided social links with the conquered territory.¹²⁸

The state found it particularly advantageous to conciliate the hereditary local functionaries like the *chaudharīs*, *muqaddams*, *qānūngos*, and *patwārīs* who played a crucial role in revenue administration. The *chaudharīs* and *muqaddams* also happened to be the social leaders of the locality. The new rulers retained their services, continuing their customary percentage of the revenues, and also giving various other concessions in cash or kind. However, with the consolidation of the kingdom of Lahore, the influence and power of the *chaudharīs*, mostly the clan leaders, appear to have decreased as the state preferred to deal directly with the *muqaddams* representing the minor lineages.¹²⁹ In fact, the general policy towards all categories of intermediaries—affecting them favourably or otherwise—appears to have been guided by considerations of the consolidation of the state.

Numerically, and in terms of the area cultivated, the peasant proprietors constituted the most important agrarian class in the Punjab plains. Using their family labour and the means of cultivation owned by themselves, they accounted for more than half of the actual cultivators. Below the peasant proprietors were tenants who subsisted on the cultivation of land belonging to others. Their rights to the use of land originated in different circumstances, but essentially constituted long- and short-term tenancies. The tenants of various descriptions constituted about 40 per cent of the actual cultivators. At the bottom rung were the village artisans or menials (*kamīns*) who earned their livelihood mainly by contributing their skills and labour towards agricultural production in ways well-defined by

custom and in return for a recognized share in the produce from the land. Above the actual producers, and besides a small proportion of the non-cultivating proprietors, were those who claimed a share in the income from a specific territory or piece of land because they were the descendants of the dispossessed conquerors, *jāgīrdārs*, revenue farmers and non-cultivating owners whom the early British administrators labelled collectively as 'superior owners' (*mālikān-i a' alā*). They were also referred to as the *ta'alluqdārs*.¹³⁰ As a whole, the ranks of the 'superior owners' were composed of the politically, economically, and socially ineffective elements who received subsistence for what they had once been. Their perpetuation was regarded as a drain on the income of the state and an unnecessary imposition on the actual cultivators. Therefore, the administrators in the kingdom of Lahore appear to have connived at the discontinuation of the cash or kind shares of the 'superior owners' wherever the cultivating fraternities happened to be strong.¹³¹

Conversely, the state favoured all those who were prepared to keep the land under cultivation and pay the revenues. Even amidst warfare, the early Sikh rulers are reported to have paid special attention to the continuation and revival of cultivation.¹³² Ranjit Singh was assiduous in the promotion of agriculture. Extension of cultivation and replacement of deserters figure prominently in his standard instructions to *kārdārs* and *ijāradārs* (revenue farmers). The administrators were expected to advance *taqāwī* loans to the needy cultivators, provide help for digging or repairing wells or irrigation channels, and encourage prospective settlers through concessional rates and various other ways, including grant of revenue-free land. Substantial increase in revenues, however, was effected through colonization of wastelands. The administrators under Ranjit Singh repaired the old perennial canals like the Shah Nahr and the Khanwah canal, and dug inundation canals. They settled pastoral tribes like the Labanas and the Gujjars as agriculturists in Gujranwala, Jhang, and the lower Sindh Sagar doāb and around Multan.¹³³ The Jalandhar doāb, 'a perfect wilderness' in the late eighteenth century, became the 'Garden of the Punjab' by the 1840s.¹³⁴ Before Ranjit Singh's death, considerable stretches of land in the upper doābs and north-western and south-western Punjab had been brought under cultivation. Colonization or recolonization of many villages in the Punjab in fact dates back to the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century.¹³⁵

All those who provided capital or labour towards colonization acquired hereditary rights in the land thus brought under cultivation. The state strongly disapproved of the ejection of tenants unless the proprietor wanted the land for his own use. However, the proprietors seldom exercised their right to eject tenants lest land should remain undercultivated. To safeguard their revenue demand, the *kārdārs* and *ijāradārs* generally protected the tenants of all descriptions against the proprietors' pressure for enhancement of *mālikāna* (proprietary dues) or ejection. The administration levied land revenue and cesses from all classes alike. The formal distinctions among different levels of agriculturists, which hinged on the liability of ejection and the payment of the *mālikāna* decreased steadily during this period. In parts of the upper doābs the hereditary tenants, most of whom were Jats, did not pay any *mālikāna* to the proprietors, while the amount of *mālikāna* was nominal in many other areas, ranging from 5 to 10 per cent of the land revenue. Here, the hereditary tenants were also allowed the right of cutting timber, laying gardens, and digging wells—the rights normally distinguishing tenants from proprietors. Many tenants in the core dominions thus came to enjoy more or less the same rights and obligations as the peasant proprietors.

Logically, the state slowly circumscribed the non-cultivating proprietors who owned villages or even larger estates, and constituted about one-tenth of the land-owners in the

kingdom of Lahore. Energetic administrators like Diwan Sawan Mal created proprietary or quasi-proprietary tenures in Multan in favour of those who were prepared to invest capital or labour in land. These tenures were based on the purchase of land, digging of wells or irrigation channels, tilling the land of the non-cultivating proprietors, or on sharing with the proprietors the payment of land revenue. The well-sinkers—variously called *chakdārs*, *sildārs*, and *taraddadkārs*—were mostly Khatri and Aroras from the trading background who acquired hereditary and transferable rights. A *chakdār*'s right to break up wasteland could not be denied by the proprietor, and if he himself wished to cultivate the land of the *chakdār*, he could do so only as the latter's tenant. Elsewhere also the state did not intervene in favour of the indolent or refractory proprietors, and allowed them to be ousted by their industrious tenants.¹³⁶ This was particularly true of the core dominions.

The general preference for the actual cultivator was evident also in regard to the village artisans or menials (*kamīns*) like the carpenters, blacksmiths, potters, leather-workers, distillers, and oil-pressers. There is evidence of some artisans themselves colonizing wastelands as tenants, or pursuing agriculture along with their traditional occupations. Wherever they had been cultivating strips of land for a long time they were generally treated like other proprietors by the state. At a few places in the core region, people from the Lohar, Tarkhan and Kalal castes were cultivating land as co-sharing proprietors when the British annexed the kingdom of Lahore.¹³⁷

On the whole, the Sikh rulers appear to have been able to tilt the balance in favour of the working rural population irrespective of social and religious affiliations. The interests of the large non-cultivating holders of land suffered in consequence. Conciliation of the peasantry was in fact the cornerstone of an overall strategy of conquest in the mid-eighteenth century. As a legacy of *rākhī*, which implicitly offered the hopes of a just society, the proportion of the produce taken away from the cultivator later on under the settled government remained on the whole less than what was collected under the Mughals.¹³⁸ The small size of their territories as well as the social background of the majority of the early Sikh rulers facilitated the vertical implementation of authority. This appears to have enabled them to establish some balance between the producers and the non-cultivating landed interests. Ranjit Singh probably intensified this process within the core region, which had already become 'exceedingly well cultivated, populous and rich' under his Sikh predecessors,¹³⁹ and extended it to other areas in his dominions.

By the end of Sikh rule nearly the whole of the core region and the riverine tracts had come to witness the maximum development of agriculture and concentration of population possible with the technology available for cultivation and irrigation.¹⁴⁰ Increased productivity presupposed the existence of market facilities. The regional market was gradually becoming a cluster of interlocking markets or towns which also served their respective hinterland. The capital towns of the early Sikh chiefs attracted traders and craftsmen in sufficient numbers to give impetus to urbanization. Many old urban centres were revived and new ones founded during this period. Religious centres, particularly those associated with Sikhism, grew into market towns, with considerable trading and manufacturing activity.¹⁴¹ The total number of small and large towns in the entire Sikh dominion was nearly 150. As may be expected from the surplus available to support the urban population, most of these centres were located in the better cultivated plains of the core region.¹⁴²

Through its trade, the kingdom of Lahore was connected with the rest of India, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. The nature and variety of exports and imports point to considerable economic activity. The system of banking in the Punjab for inter-regional and intra-regional commerce appears to have been fairly well organized. The use of indig-

enous and Marwari bankers for the collection of land revenue or for payment of salaries to the army or for the purchase of military stores in Ranjit Singh's reign, or the remittance of revenue through *hundīs*, may be seen as a reflection of the efficacy of the banking organization in late medieval north India.¹⁴³ The city of Amritsar could become larger than the city of Lahore not only because of its religious importance and its status as the second capital of Ranjit Singh, but also because of its own commerce and manufactures.¹⁴⁴ In fact, intensification of the process of mobilization of agricultural surplus and manufacturing skills from the hinterland to the towns was evident under his predecessors in the late eighteenth century.¹⁴⁵ The collection of land revenue largely in cash, and the increasing incidence of cash salaries to the army and to a host of other state functionaries in the kingdom of Lahore, point to the strengthening of the cash nexus in the region.

On the whole, there was a much greater horizontal and vertical integration in the Punjab as a regional policy. A much larger proportion of its rural and urban population was drawn into the apparatus that created scope for individual initiative. As members of the ruling class and petty bureaucracy, as the *jāgīrdārs* and religious grantees, and as soldiers in the Khalsa army, and even as peasants, artisans and traders, a substantial segment of the region's population experienced spacial and upward mobility. This process appears to have been aided also by the Sikh movement that normatively did not recognize any structural barriers to social mobility. Yet, there was no significant technological or structural change, and the Punjab under Sikh rule remained rooted in medieval Indian polity and society.¹⁴⁶

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Ganda Singh (ed.), *Hukamnāme* (Punjabi) (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1967), pp. 194–5. For the social background of Banda's appointees, J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib (ed.) *Sikh History from Persian Sources: Translation of Major Texts* (New Delhi: Tulika/Indian History Congress, 2001), p. 162.
- 2 Ratan Singh Bhangu, *Prāchīn Panth Parkāsh* (Punjabi) (edited by Bhai Vir Singh) (New Delhi: Bhai Vir Singh Sahit Sadan, 1993 [reprint]), pp. 132–3.
- 3 Ibid., p. 131.
- 4 'Tankhāhnāma' of Bhai Nand Lal, reproduced in W.H. McLeod, *Sikhs of the Khalsa: A History of the Khalsa Rahit* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 279–85; idem, *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1987), p. 196.
- 5 Sainapat, *Sri Gur Sobhā* (Punjabi) (edited by Shamsher Singh Ashok) (Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, 1967), pp. 64, 90.
- 6 Bhangu, *Prāchīn Panth Parkāsh*, pp. 301–2, 353. For his theory of martyrdom, pp. 39, 143, 414–25.
- 7 Ibid., p. 151.
- 8 Ibid., pp. 213, 215–17.
- 9 McLeod, *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama*, pp. 9–11, 31–44.
- 10 Bhangu, *Prāchīn Panth Parkāsh*, pp. 222–7, 231–2; Gurtej Singh, 'Bhai Mani Singh in Historical Perspective', in *Proceedings Punjab History Conference* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1968), pp. 126–7.
- 11 Mufti Aliuddin, 'Ibratnama' (Persian), MS, Sikh History Research Department (hereafter SHR) 1277, Khalsa College, Amritsar, pp. 284–5; H.R. Gupta, *History of the Sikhs, 1739–68* (vol. I) (Simla: Minerva Bookshop, 1952 [2nd edition]), pp. 49–50.
- 12 Bhangu, *Prāchīn Panth Parkāsh*, pp. 325–6.
- 13 B.N. Goswamy and J.S. Grewal, *The Mughal and Sikh Rulers and the Vaishnavas of Pindori* (A Historical Interpretation of 52 Persian Documents) (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1969), documents XVIII–XXI, XXIV, XXV.
- 14 Grewal and Habib (ed.), *Sikh History from Persian Sources*, p. 189.
- 15 Ibid., p. 181.
- 16 Bhangu, *Prāchīn Panth Parkāsh*, p. 368.

- 17 Ibid., p. 369.
- 18 McLeod, *Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama*, pp. 38–9.
- 19 Grewal and Habib, *Sikh History from Persian Sources*, pp. 190–91.
- 20 Joseph Davey Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, (published 1849) (New Delhi: Rupa, 2003 [reprint]), p. 102.
- 21 Grewal and Habib, *Sikh History from Persian Sources*, pp. 187–8, 195–7, 199. This engagement of 1764 does not find mention in the existing scholarly studies of the period.
- 22 Qazi Nur Muhammad, 'Jangnāmāh' (Persian), MS, SHR 1547, Khalsa College, Amritsar, p. 177.
- 23 Grewal and Habib, *Sikh History from Persian Sources*, pp. 191–6, 199.
- 24 Ibid., pp. 207–9. Their leader was the celebrated martyr Nihang Gurbakhsh Singh. For detail, Bhangu, *Prāchīn Panth Parkāsh*, pp. 414–25.
- 25 J.S. Grewal in Grewal and Habib, *ibid.*, 'Introduction', p. 33.
- 26 For Banda's seal on his orders, Ganda Singh, *Hukamnāme*, pp. 192, 194. For coins, C.J., Rodgers, 'On the Coins of the Sikhs', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. I, no. 1 (1881), p. 79.
- 27 Rodgers, *ibid.*, p. 81. According to Ganesh Das, a qanūngo of Gujarat in the kingdom of Lahore, mints had been set up in every pargana town in the territory of individual chiefs. *Chār Bāgh-i Panjab* (Persian) (edited by Kirpal Singh) (Amritsar: Khalsa College, 1965), pp. 132–3.
- 28 The coins of the principalities of Patiala and Jind to the south of the Sutlej acknowledged the overlordship of Ahmad Shah Abdali. Nabha, however, used the Gobind Shahi coin. Lepel Griffin, *The Minor Phulkian Families* (Patiala: Punjab Languages Department, 1970 [reprint of 2nd edition]), pp. 285–7, n. 1.
- 29 Bhangu, *Prāchīn Panth Parkāsh*, pp. 399–400.
- 30 Veena Sachdeva, *Polity and Economy of the Punjab During the Late Eighteenth Century* (Delhi: Manohar, 1993), pp. 80, 97, 160–3; Indu Banga, *Agrarian System of the Sikhs* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1978), pp. 31–5; J.S. Grewal, *Ideology, Polity and Social Order* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996), pp. 75–9, 96.
- 31 For an analysis of Ahmad Shah of Batala on the misl, Grewal, *ibid.*, pp. 73–9.
- 32 According to a news report from Delhi, dated 4 April 1764, both Hari Singh and Charhat Singh fought over Lahore after the rout of the Afghan army. Grewal and Habib, *Sikh History from Persian Sources*, pp. 197–8.
- 33 For graphic descriptions of territorial disputes and changing alliances, Joginder Kaur (ed.), *Ram Sukh Rao's Sri Fateh Singh Partāp Prabhākar* (A History of the Early Nineteenth Century Punjab in Punjabi) (Patiala: Published by Editor, 1980), pp. 65, 89, 119, 148, 238, 333, 445; 'Introduction', pp. 20–2.
- 34 J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, *Civil and Military Affairs of Maharaja Ranjit Singh: A Study of 450 Orders in Persian* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1987), pp. 74–5 and documents 65, 93, 111, 114–16, 119, 282, 328, 332, 373, 377; Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut Tawārīkh* (Pbi. tr.) (translated by Amarwant Singh, edited by J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga) (Amritsar: GNDU, 1987), daftar II, pp. 456, 469, 477, 482, 484–6. Sachdeva, *Policy and Economy of the Punjab*, pp. 97–102.
- 35 Banga, *Agrarian System of the Sikhs*, p. 36.
- 36 As evident from the *Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama*, the term *dharmśāl* remained current till the mid 1760s. McLeod, *Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama*, p. 37; *idem*, *Sikhs of the Khalsa*, pp. 227–9.
- 37 Joginder Kaur, *Ram Sukh Rao's Sri Fateh Singh Partāp Prabhākar*, p. 40. Cf. Madanjit Kaur, *The Golden Temple: Past and Present* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1983), p. 52.
- 38 The words used are 'Sri Maharaj Singh Sahib Ranjit Singh Ji'. Madanjit Kaur, *Golden Temple*, opposite p. 54.
- 39 Cf. Ganda Singh, 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh: A Short Life-Sketch', in Teja Singh and Ganda Singh (eds.), *Maharaja Ranjit Singh: First Death Centenary Memorial* (Amritsar: Khalsa College, 1939), pp. 19–20; Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991 [reprint]), vol. I, pp. 200–202; Bhagat Singh, *Sikh Polity in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (New Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1978), pp. 149–50. The above-mentioned authors do not cite any evidence for the 'coronation' of Ranjit Singh as Maharaja in 1801. Interestingly, Ranjit Singh's court chronicler, Sohan Lal Suri, is silent about any such happening in 1801, although he does refer to Ranjit Singh's succession to the gaddī after the death of Mahan Singh.
- 40 Goswamy and Grewal, *Mughal and Sikh Rulers*, documents XXI, XXIII, XXXI, XXXII, XXXIV.
- 41 Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, appendices XXIII–XXX, pp. 379–93. The British used the title 'Maharaja' for Ranjit Singh only in the treaties of 1832, 1834, and 1838.
- 42 Sita Ram Kohli, 'The Organization of the Khalsa Army', in Teja Singh and Ganda Singh (eds.) *Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, opposite p. 76.

- 43 Goswamy and Grewal, *Mughal and Sikh Rulers*, pp. 205–6, 223–35; ibidem [36–42 from pp. 375–6], *The Mughals and the Jogis of Jakhbar* (Some *Madad-i-Ma'āsh* and other Documents) (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1967), pp. 190–1. The words in Persian are *m'amūl qadīm*.
- 44 From John Lawrence to H.M. Elliot, Foreign/Secret Consultation, National Archives of India, New Delhi (abbreviated hereafter as NAI). 30 October 1847, no. 95.
- 45 Apart from the Settlement Reports of the lower Rachna Doab, Hazara district, Kohat district, and Dera Ghazi Khan district, there are references to these units in the following Persian and Urdu sources: Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat ut-Tawārīkh* (Lahore: New Imperial Press, 1887–89); Parwānājāt-i Sardar Chatar Singh wa Sardar Sher Singh Atariwala, Khalsa College, Amritsar, MSS, SHR, 1264 and 1265 (2 parts); Ganesh Das, *Chār Bāgh-i Panjab*; Munshi Gopal Das, *Tārīkh-i Peshawar*; Amar Nath, *Zafarnāma-i Ranjit Singh* (edited by Sita Ram Kohli) (Lahore: University of the Punjab, 1928).
- 46 According to John Lawrence, the nazim was required to punctually send the revenues collected from the territory under his charge: Foreign/Secret Consultation, NAI, 26 December 1846, no. 1325–27.
- 47 For example, in 1833, the year of famine in Kashmir, Ranjit Singh wrote a sarcastic letter to Kanwar Sher Singh, who was the nazim of Kashmir at this time, in order to make him realize that he had been neglecting his duties: Suri, *Umdat ut-Tawārīkh*, daftar III, part 2, p. 180. Soon afterwards Sher Singh was removed from governorship and Mihan Singh was appointed in his place with very strict injunctions to restore Kashmir to its former prosperity: ibid., p. 201; Amar Nath, *Zafarnāma*, pp. 226–7.
- For some other examples of Ranjit Singh's quick response to reports and complaints against the functionaries of the state, Suri, *Umdat ut-Tawārīkh*, daftar III, part 1, pp. 9, 12–13, 129; part 2, pp. 133, 134, 139, 145, 179, 180, 268; H.L.O. Garrett and G.L. Chopra (tr.), *Events at the Court of Ranjit Singh, 1810–1817* (Patiala: Punjab Languages Department, 1970 [reprint]), pp. 38, 86, 87, 254, 271.
- 48 Ganesh Das, *Chār Bāgh-i Panjab*, p. 381. According to Munshi Hukam Chand, Diwan Sawan Mal 'was a wise administrator and the people of Multan mention his name with great respect'. He was regular in attending to the affairs of his office and used to sit there daily for several hours. Besides administering justice personally, he paid very careful attention to revenue papers: *Tārīkh-i Zila'-i Multan* (Urdu). For Amar Singh Majithia's 'good administration' in Hazara, Muhammad Azam Beg, *Tārīkh-i Hazara* (Lahore: Victoria Press, 1874), II, (Lahore, 1876), p. 691. (Lahore: New Imperial Press, 1884), pp. 470, 471.
- 49 For reference to Ventura's 'good' administration, F.W.R. Fryer, *Final Report on the First Regular Settlement of the Dera Ghazi Khan District (1869–1874)*, (Lahore: 1879) p. 37.
- 50 For some details regarding the functioning of the office of the dīwān at Lahore, Sita Ram Kohli, *Catalogue of Khalsa Darbar Records* (2 vols) (Lahore: 1919 and 1927), vol. II, pp. 9–11.
- 51 Mir Ahmad, *Dastūr al-Amāl-i Kashmir* (Persian) MS, M/829, Punjab State Archives, Patiala, ff. 26 a–57 b.
- 52 Ganesh Das, *Chār Bāgh-i Panjab* (Persian) pp. 161, 162, 170, 172, 221, 295, 296, 298, 299, 300, 301, 304–5.
- 53 Goswamy and Grewal, *Mughal and Sikh Rulers*, documents XIX, XXIX, XXXI, XXXIV, XLIV.
- 54 Ibid., documents XXX, XXXII, XXXIII, XXXVIII, XLI, XLII.
- 55 Bute Shah, *Tārīkh-i Panjab* (Persian) MS, SHR 1288, 2289, Khalsa College, Amritsar, pp. 495–500; Ahmad Shah, *Tārīkh-i Hind* (Persian) MS, SHR 1291, Khalsa Collage, Amritsar, pp. 142, 146, 147, 162, 283, 293.
- 56 It must be pointed out that the use of the terms pargana and ta'alluqa is very much there in the *Khalsa Darbar Records* in Persian and now of the Panjab State Archives, Chandigarh. To take up just one folio (bundle 5, vol. I, f. 562), the term pargana is used for Hajipur, Daska, Sujampur, Kangra, Wazirabad, Sialkot, and Hallowal. The term ta'alluqa is used for Rajpura, Sohian, Shahpur, and Wainki. However, there also appear phrases like *pargana-i ta'alluqa-i qila-i Kotla*. Also, for Hallowal both pargana and ta'alluqa are used. For Sohian and Shahpur, *zila'* and ta'alluqa are used.

The preponderance of the term ta'alluqa in the *Khalsa Darbar Records* appears to have been the reason for its uniform use by Sita Ram Kohli to the exclusion of the term pargana altogether: Kohli, *Catalogue of Khalsa Darbar Records* (vol. II), pp. 13–14, 21–2, 27–8, 34–5, 42, 47–8 and passim.

- 57 Ganesh Das, *Chār Bāgh-i Panjab*, pp. 162, 163, 168, 170, 172, 256, 257, 272, 298; *Punjab Government Records* (1847–49) (vol. V), (Lahore: 1915), p. 224; Shahamat Ali, *The Sikhs and Afghans*, (first published 1847) (Patiala: Languages Department Punjab, 1970 [reprint]), p. 277; Foreign/Political Consultation, NAI, 31 December 1847, nos. 2470–75; 31 December 1847, no. 1830, para 11.

Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1526–1707* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999 [second revised edition]), pp. 14, 335 n, 110, 545. These references are from the U.P. and the Punjab. Goswamy and Grewal, *The Mughals and the Jogis of Jakhbar*, document III, Noman Ahmad Siddiqi, *Land Revenue Administration Under the Mughals; 1700–1750* (Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University, 1970), pp. 39, 42, 81, 82, 159; B.R. Grover, 'Raqba-Bandi Documents of Akbar's Reign', *Indian Historical Records Commission*, XXXVI, part 2, pp. 59–60 and nn. 21, 22, 23.

- 58 Goswamy and Grewal, *Mughal and Sikh Rulers*, documents XVIII, XXI, XXV, XXIX, XXXV, XLII, XLIV.
- 59 Ibid., document XXXVIII; Suri, *Umdat ut-Tawārīkh*, daftar II, p. 306; daftar V, pp. 22, 125.
- 60 Munshi Bakhtawar Lal, *Tārīkh-i Zila'i Montgomery* (Urdu) MS, SHR 1247, Khalsa College, Amritsar, pp. 19, 21, 23, 35; Lepel Griffin, *Chiefs and Families of Note in the Punjab*, 2 vols (revised by W.L. Canran and H.D. Craik), Lahore, 1909, pp. 121, 182, 302.
- 61 Amar Nath, *Zafarnāma*, p. 140; Ahmad Shah, *Tārīkh-i Hind*, p. 481; Griffin, *ibid.*, vol. I. p. 292.
- 62 Suri, *Umdat ut-Tawārīkh*, daftar II, pp. 394, 401; Foreign/Political Consultation. NAI, 21 May 1852, No. 142.
- 63 Saiyid Mehar Shah, the kārḍār of Bhera, was confirmed in office only after he had sent his *raza'-nāma*: Suri, *ibid.*, daftar V, p. 37.
- 64 Transcription of this order is given by Sita Ram Kohli, 'Land Revenue Administration under Maharajah Ranjit Singh', *Journal of the Punjab Historical Society*, vol. VII, no. 2 (1919), pp. 74–90; J.M. Douie, *Punjab Settlement Manual* (3rd ed.), Lahore: 1915, p. 20.
- 65 Munshi Hukam Chand, *Tārīkh-i Zila'-i Multan*, (Urdu) (Lahore: 1882), pp. 471–2; Edward O'Brien, *Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Muzaffargarh District* (1873–1880), (Lahore: 1882), p. 52.
- 66 O'Brien, *ibid.*, p. 53; Hukam Chand, *ibid.*, p. 472.
- 67 Foreign/Political Consultation, NAI, 16 April 1852, no. 99; 7 May 1852, nos. 40–43; Foreign/Political Proceedings, NAI, 30 April 1852, Nos. 99–102; 14 November, 1851, no. 55; 18 June 1852, nos. 181–5; 7 January 1853, nos. 238–42; 24 June 1854, nos. 204–5.
- There are numerous references in the *Umdat-ut Tawārīkh* to individuals receiving cash from kārḍārs in accordance with the orders of Ranjit Singh, while the kārḍārs are asked to keep the receipts so that their accounts may accordingly be credited.
- 68 Foreign/Political Consultation, NAI, 29 December 1849, no. 49 A; Foreign/Political Proceedings, NAI, 15 October, 1852, no.122; 10 June 1853, no.217.
- 69 For example, *News of the Court of Ranjit Singh*, Persian Miscellaneous 65, NAI, pp. 50–51; *Events at the Court of Ranjit Singh*, p. 206.
- 70 Suri, *Umdat-ut Tawārīkh*, daftar II, p. 403; daftar IV, part 1, p. 62; part 3, p. 23; daftar V, pp. 23, 38 and passim; Hukam Chand, *Tārīkh-i Zila'-i Multan*, p. 472; *Events at the Court of Ranjit Singh*, pp. 40, 83, 89, 162, 170, 221.
- 71 *Khalsa Darbar Records*, bundle 4, vol. IV, pp. 1, 8, 19.
- 72 This was Kanhiya Lal, grandson of Diwan Moti Ram: Griffin, *Chiefs and Families of Note*, vol. II, p. 164.
- 73 *Chār Bāgh-i Panjab*, pp 200–3. According to Barnes, a kārḍār seldom stayed at one place for more than three years: *Settlement Report of Kangra*, quoted Douie, *Punjab Settlement Manual*, p. 20.
- 74 This is evident from the figures given in the Statistical Notes on the Punjab prepared by John Lawrence. This report contains, among other things, the name of the kārḍār, the annual collection from the area, and the salary of the kārḍār: Foreign/Secret Consultation, NAI, 26 December 1846, nos. 1325–27.
- 75 Diary of J. Nicholson, *Punjab Government Records, 1847–49* (vol. VI), pp. 304, 358–9, 421; Foreign/Secret Consultation, NAI, 26 December 1846, nos. 1325–57; *Khalsa Darbar Records*, bundle 4, vol. IV, pp. 1,8, 19.
- 76 Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, pp. 331–2; Siddiqi, *Land Revenue Administration Under the Mughals*, pp. 88, 90; Goswamy and Grewal, *Mughals and the Jogis of Jakhbar*, p. 90, n. 16; idem, *The Mughal and Sikh Rulers*, p. 91 n. 6.
- 77 *Chār Bāgh-i Panjab*, pp. 163, 168, 175, 209, 211, 221, 295–6, 298.
- 78 Ibid., pp. 301–3.
- 79 Ibid., p. 250. The qānūngoi of Zafarwal was held by an old Brahman family: *ibid.*, p. 219.
- 80 Ganesh Das refers to Ismatullah as one of the qānūngos of Gujarat in the time of Gujjar Singh Bhangi: *ibid.*, p. 176. Murad Ali Kakezai is mentioned as the qānūngo of Pasrur in the *Khalsa Darbar Records*, bundle 5, vol. XIII, part 3, p. 275. The documents of the *Bhandari Collection*, Punjab State Archives, Patiala, show the existence of several Muslim qānūngos in Batila during the Sikh times.
- For the continuance of the office of qānūngo in Kashmir under the Sikhs, Mir Ahmad, *Dastūr al-Amal-i Kashmir*, Section 2, f. 59 a.
- 81 For discussion of the functions of the qānūngo in the Mughal times, Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, pp. 226, 333–4 and passim.
- 82 Kohli, 'Land Revenue Administration under Maharajah Ranjit Singh', p. 88.
- 83 *Khalsa Darbar Records*, bundle 5, vol. XIII, pp. 79, 113, 127, 247.
- 84 Griffin, *Chiefs and Families of Note*, vol. II, p. 136. The *rasūm-i qānūngoi* in Kashmir consisted of about 16 *manwatta* of grains from every *kharwār*. Mir Ahmad, *Dastūr al-Amal-i Kashmir*, section 2, f. 57a. Diary of P.S. Melville, *Punjab Government Records*, vol. VI, p. 217.

- 85 Ghulam Muhammad, *Dastūr al-'Amal* (Persian), M/933, Punjab State Archives, Patiala, f. 15a. For the position of the chaudharī during the Mughal period, Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, pp. 154, 214, 272–3, 275, 282, 287nn.25, 31, 293, 295–6, 331, 333, 335–8, 353n.54; Siddiqi, *Land Revenue Administration under the Mughals*, pp. 90, 91; B.R. Grover, 'Nature of *Dehat-i-Taaluqa* (Zamindari Villages) and the Evolution of the *Taaluqdari* System during the Mughal Age', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. II, no. 2, (1965), pp. 171–2.
- 86 Bakhtawar Lal, *Tarikh-i Zila-i Montgomery*, pp. 1–2.
- 87 Diary of H.B. Edwardes, *Punjab Government Records*, vol. V, p. 225; Diary of G. Lawrence, *ibid.* vol. IV, pp. 415, 434.
- 88 J.M. Done, *Settlement Report of Karnal-Ambala* (Lahore: 1891), pp. 93–4; L.S. Saunders, *Report on the revised Settlement of the Lahore District*, (1865–69) (Lahore: 1873), p. 66.
- 89 R. Temple, 'Statement on Inam Zamindaris held by Chaudharis and Lambardars in Pargunnah Gurdaspur', Foreign/Political Consultation, NAI, 5 September 1856, nos. 109–15.
- 90 'Report on the Summary Settlement of the Cis-Satlaj Territories of the Lahore Darbar and the Ahluwalia Chief', Foreign/Political Consultation, NAI, 31 December 1847, no. 1829, para 14; no. 1830, para 17 and no.1832, para 3.
- 91 *Khalsa Darbar Records*, bundle 5, vol. XIV, pp. 127–36.
- 92 *Ibid.*, vol. XIII, part 3, pp. 59, 187, 209, 211, 217, 219; vol. XIV, p. 191; vol. XIII, part 3, pp. 231, 243, 287, 291.
- 93 Foreign/Political Consultation, NAI, 20 August 1852, Nos. 135–36.
- 94 *Khalsa Darbar Records*, vol. III, part 3, pp. 63–4; bundle 4, vol. V, pp. 201–2. In the former the grantee is Chaudhari Jan Muhammad Khokhar and the phrase used is *wajah-i in'am wa pachotra*; in the latter the phrase used is *in'am-i pachotra-i zamindāran*.
- 95 'Statement of Inam Zamindaris in purgunnah Gurdaspur', Foreign/Political Consultation, NAI, 5 September 1856, nos. 109–15.
- 96 For the position of the patwārī during the Mughal period, Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, pp. 152–4, 166–8; Siddiqi, *Land Revenue Administration under the Mughals*, pp. 19–20.
- 97 Saunders, *Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of Lahore*, 1865–69, p. 69.
- 98 R.P. Nisbet, *Report on the Revision of the Land Revenue Settlement of the Gujranwala District (1866–67)* (Lahore: 1874), p. 49.
- 99 Cf. Ghulam Muhammad, *Dastūr al-Amal*, f. 14 b. This revenue manual states that a quarter seer in a maund was received by the patwārī at some places and half a seer at others. Where paid in cash, the remuneration of the patwārī was half an anna in a rupee. According to this statement, the patwārī's commission ranged from over 0.5 to over 3 per cent.
- 100 Goswamy and Grewal, *Mughals and the Jogis of Jakhbar*, document XVII; *idem*, *Mughal and Sikh Rulers*, documents XIX, XXIII–XXVI, XXVIII–XXX, XXXV–XXXVII. Grewal and Banga, *Civil and Military Affairs*, documents 46, 59, 125, 162, 184, 228 and *passim*; Indu Banga, 'The Maharaja Orders: A Study of 462 Parwanas', *Journal of Regional History*, vol. II (1981), pp. 110, 124.
- 101 *Guru Granth Sahib*, Sri Rag, p. 74. The original reads as under:

Hun hukam hoa meharban da
Pai koi kise na ranjan da
Sabhe sukhali muthian
Ae hoa halemi raj jio
- 102 These orders are reproduced by Waheeduddin, *The Real Ranjit Singh* opposite pp. 31–2.
- 103 Gulshanlal Chopra, *The Punjab as a Sovereign State (1799–1839)* (Hoshiarpur: Vishveshvaranand Vedic Research Institute, 1960 [2nd edition]), pp. 89–91.
- 104 Waheeduddin, *The Real Ranjit Singh*, opposite p. 31.
- 105 Fauja Singh [Bajwa], *Military System of the Sikhs* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964), p. 149. The specific reference in Fauja Singh is to discipline and punishment in the army.
- 106 Several judicial documents of the *Bhandari Collection* at the Punjab State Archives, Patiala, were executed in the qāzīs's court: J.S. Grewal, *In the By-Lanes of History: Some Persian Documents from a Punjab Town* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1975), documents XIII–XX, XXV–XXVII.
- 107 Fauja Singh, *Military System of the Sikhs*, pp. 152–3. Mutilation of limbs was resorted to only in cases of 'grave offences' like assaults on women. Chopra, *Punjab as a Sovereign State*, p. 90.
- 108 Grewal and Banga, *Civil and Military Affairs*, p. 147.
- 109 Quoted, Fauja Singh, *Military System of the Sikhs*, p. 151.
- 110 Goswamy and Grewal, *Mughal and Sikh Rulers*, pp. 227–8.

- 111 Grewal, 'Passage to Vassalage', in *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1982), pp. 160–8.
- 112 Jean-Marie Lafont, *French Administrators of Maharaja Ranjit Singh* (Delhi: National Book Shop, 1988 [revised edition]), pp. 1–45; *ibid.*, 'The French in the Sikh Kingdom of the Punjab, 1822–1849', in *Indika: Essays in Indo-French Relations 1630–1976* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000), pp. 205–14.
- 113 Fauja Singh, *Military System of the Sikhs*, p. 108.
- 114 *Ibid.*, pp. 140–41.
- 115 This comes out from several documents in Grewal and Banga, *Civil and Military Affairs*.
- 116 Shahamat Ali, *The Sikhs and the Afghans*, p. 23.
- 117 This appears to have been the result as much of Ranjit Singh's conquests and concern for the troops as of his encouragement to the Singh identity in various ways. Grewal and Banga, *Civil and Military Affairs*, documents 65, 93, 114–16, 119, 183, 365, 377, 404, 417; Indu Banga, 'Formation of the Sikh State, 1765–1845' in Indu Banga (ed.), *Five Punjabi Centuries* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000), pp. 105–6. Cf. Richard Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 142. Fox assumes that 'Sikh identity' was created by the British after annexation.
- 118 Sita Ram Kohli, *Sunset of the Sikh Empire* (edited by Khushwant Singh) (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1967), pp. 14–100. Between 1839 and 1845 four rulers (Kharak Singh, Naunihal Singh, Sher Singh and Dalip Singh) and four prime ministers (Dhian Singh, Hira Singh, Jawahar Singh and Lal Singh) came in quick succession.
- 119 Fauja Singh, *Military System of the Sikhs*, p. 98.
- 120 Quoted, *ibid.*, p. 101.
- 121 Grewal, *Reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, pp. 32–3.
- 122 Grewal, *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, pp. 160–68.
- 123 Inderyas Bhatti, 'Nobility under the Lahore Darbar, 1799–1849', M. Phil. dissertation, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1981, appendices, A–K, pp. 120–75.
- 124 Charles Masson quoted, Banga, *Agrarian System of the Sikhs*, p. 147, n. 107.
- 125 Joginder Kaur, *Ram Sukh Rao's Sri Fateh Singh Partāp Prabhākar*, p. 55.
- 126 This comes out clearly from Kohli, *Catalogue of the Khalsa Darbar Records*, vol. II, 1927, pp. 302–3. For a discussion of the composition of the ruling class, J.S. Grewal, *The Reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Structure of Power, Economy and Society*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1981, pp. 32–3; Indu Banga, 'The Ruling Class in the Kingdom of Lahore', *Journal of Regional History*, vol. III, (1982), pp. 15–24. For a broadly similar composition of the ruling class in the state of Kapurthala founded by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Joginder Kaur, *Ram Sukh Rao's Sri Fateh Singh Partāp Prabhākar*, pp. 51–2.
- 127 Banga, 'The Maharaja Orders', p. 127.
- 128 Banga, *Agrarian System of the Sikhs*, pp. 148–66.
- 129 *Ibid.*, pp. 82–7, 104.
- 130 Indu Banga, 'Ecology and Land Rights', [*International*] *Journal of Punjab Studies*, Vol. 11, no. 1 (2004), pp. 59–76.
- 131 Dolores Domin, *India in 1857–59: A Study in the Role of the Sikhs in the People's Uprising* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1977), pp. 37–9, 47–50.
- 132 Sachdeva, *Polity and Economy of the Punjab*, pp. 108–9.
- 133 Kohli, 'Land Revenue Administration under Maharajah Ranjit Singh', pp. 80–87; Banga, *Agrarian System of the Sikhs*, pp. 77, 111–12; Fauja Singh Bajwa, *State and Society under Ranjit Singh* (Delhi: Master Publishers, 1982), pp. 206–16.
- 134 Foreign/Political Proceedings, NAI, 31 December 1847, no. 2443, para 7, for John Lawrence's 'Report on the Summary Settlement of the Jullundur Doab'.
- 135 B.H. Baden Powell, *The Land Systems of British India* (3 vols) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), vol. II, pp. 678–81; Radha Sharma, *Peasantry and the State* (New Delhi: K.K. Publishers, 2000) p. 68.
- 136 Banga, *Agrarian System of the Sikhs*, pp. 176–8.
- 137 Harish C. Sharma, 'Artisans in the Punjab Under Maharaja Ranjit Singh', in J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga (eds), *Maharaja Ranjit Singh and His Times* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1980), pp. 182–3.
- 138 Banga, *Agrarian System of the Sikhs*, pp. 110, 113–17.
- 139 Ganda Singh, *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs* (Calcutta: *Indian Studies: Past and Present* [reprint], 1962), p. 62.
- 140 Sukhwant Singh, 'Agricultural Production in the Punjab under Maharaja Ranjit Singh', in Grewal and Banga (eds), *Maharaja Ranjit Singh and His Times*, pp. 139–57.

- 141 Indu Banga, 'Polity, Economy and Urbanization in the Upper Bari Doab (1700–1947)', in J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga (eds), *Studies in Urban History* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1981), pp. 192–205; Sachdeva, *Polity and Economy of the Punjab*, pp. 136–8.
- 142 Reeta Grewal, 'Polity, Economy and Urbanization: Early 19th Century Punjab', *Journal of Regional History*, vol. IV (1983), pp. 56–72.
- 143 Bajwa, *State and Society under Ranjit Singh*, pp. 217–53, 405–10; Grewal and Banga, *Civil and Military Affairs*, documents 72, 240, 249, 255.
- 144 J.S. Grewal, 'Historical Development of Amritsar in Retrospect', in Fauja Singh (ed.), *The City of Amritsar: A Study of Historical, Cultural, Social and Economic Aspects* (New Delhi: Oriental Publishers and Distributors, 1978), pp. 373–80; A Gauba, *Amritsar: A Study in Urban History (1840–1947)* (Jalandhar: ABS Publications, 1992), pp. 19–24.
- 145 Sachdeva, *Polity and Economy of the Punjab*, pp. 131–46.
- 146 Indu Banga, 'Social Mobility', in Indu Banga and J.S. Grewal (eds), *Maharaja Ranjit Singh: The State and Society* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 2001), pp. 257–69.

PART 4

CHAPTER 23

Tribes and Tribal Organization

Irfan Habib

It may be said, with pardonable exaggeration, that there can be as many definitions of the term 'tribe' as there are bodies and bands of people so designated by the learned. A sense of common ancestry is held in the dictionaries to be the chief defining feature of a tribe. But this can hardly be considered by itself a sufficient requisite. Other elements may enter the making of a tribe, such as marriage restrictions, especially endogamy; similarity of occupations pursued by its members; specific customs and rites; common rights to lands and pastures; a territory of its own; internal apparatus of control and organization for defence and offence; and a strong sense of shared identity. It is not clear which features out of these must necessarily be present and in what strength to qualify a group as a tribe. In India there is the further matter of distinguishing between tribes and castes, since a caste too may possess the features that we have listed for a tribe.

Indeed, in his memoirs, the first Mughal emperor, Babur (1526–30), saw the Indian castes as fully analogous to tribes:

In our lands [Central Asia], people who wander in the steppes (*sahra*) are distinguished by tribe (*qabila*, *qabila*); here [in India], people who inhabit [settled] tracts and villages, are distinguished by tribe.¹

It is clear that to Babur's mind only nomads could be organized in tribes; and in India it was a special case that such tribal divisions, in the form of castes, should be maintained by sedentary populations as well. This can, perhaps, lead us to one means whereby we can locate 'tribes' in India, beyond the welter of castes. We begin our search for these among the non-sedentary or semi-sedentary populations. We can perhaps invoke a further, and perhaps surer source of assistance: groups that are outside the social limits within which the caste system consciously functions may be identified as possible tribes. It may be mentioned that while the social order in which the caste system generally prevails may be characterized as Hindu, there are Muslim communities too, which, by their endogamous customs and consciousness of a distinct place in social hierarchy, such as weavers and butchers, are clearly classifiable as castes, not tribes.²

We can recognize a community excluded from the caste system when we read in Bhīmsen of his encounter in 1690 with 'wild men' between Kurnool and Nandyal in modern Andhra Pradesh:

Between Kurnool and Nandyal, as the road runs at the foot of a hill range, a *ban mānas*, that is, a man of the forest, was seen. Such people are not familiar with the idiom and language of the villagers who are settled around the foot of the mountains; and their language is not understood by the village-inhabitants. Their food consists of honey, wild seeds and meat of hunted animals. They are very dark and have hair all over their body. They tie tree-leaves on their heads. They hold in their hands an arrow without wing, point or head. All this is for hunting; they do not fight with any one. They live in the mountains and caves and on shaded trees, and so avoid being troubled by rain or sun. The village-inhabitants cannot go into the mountains. If anyone proposes to go into the mountains to their habitations, he cannot make his way there, since they get large numbers [to oppose them]. By means of a clever device, some of these persons had been seized in the mountains and brought before Prince [Muḥammad Kām Bakḥsh]. His Highness ordered some gift [of money] for them. Since they have no attachment to gold or silver, they showed no pleasure at getting the gold coins and rupees. To cut the story short, they brought them to that mountain and freed them. They rushed with such speed away to the mountain heights, as could not have been the work of human beings.³

The community in question obviously belonged to a group of forest tribes, scattered over parts of south India up to Kerala.⁴ It is implied in Bhīmsen's account that the people he describes had some kind of internal organization to enable them to gather 'large numbers' to oppose intruders from the plains. One can infer the presence of headmen, and the use of calls and signals for warning and mobilization—a very primitive network, which must have been based on custom, since money relations of any kind did not exist.

Muḥammad Kāzīm, the official Mughal historian, offers a description of the forebears of the present-day Naga tribes in his account of the Ahom kingdom of Assam in the year 1661–62:

There are other mountainous parts, whose inhabitants are called Nang. The inhabitants of the said mountains do not pay taxes to the Raja [of Assam] but profess allegiance and obey some of his orders... In the mountains, inhabited by the Nang race, fine aloe-wood is procured in abundance. Every year a group of that race brings aloe-wood to Assam and exchanges it for salt and grain. This aberrant set, who inhabit the mountains, are separated by a long distance from the general run of human nature and the devices of human attributes and dispositions. They spend their life naked from foot to head and eat dog, cat, mouse, ant, locust and such-like things, whatever they can find.⁵

Here, again, there is very little that we get about the internal organization of the Nagas. They must have had chiefs who could proffer a nominal allegiance to the Ahom court and undertake to carry out some unspecified orders of the Ahom ruler. We must remember that these people were given the name *Nang*, from their reputedly going naked, and not because of any common beliefs in the Naga cult.⁶ The tribes so designated, speaking a multiplicity of mutually incomprehensible languages, could hardly have had any idea of the various tribes constituting a single people. It is not surprising, therefore, that there was no uniform mode or practice with respect to tribal chiefdom. In more recent days, 'while some [Naga tribes] have sacrosanct chiefs so sacred that they must not touch the common soil, others are governed by councils of elders, and others again are extreme democracies'.⁷ 'Democracy' here presumably means no more than that the chief carried little influence over decisions of individual heads of families.

The two tribal communities in the Deccan and the north-east about which we have presented seventeenth-century accounts inhabited forests that provided them their major means of sustenance. Here the tribal bonds arose because large forest areas had to be shared among sets of families (clans, tribes) who had to band together to protect their terrain from other similar groups. But the way Bābur assumes that the people of 'the steppes' (*ṣaḥrā*) are naturally organized into tribes,⁸ reminds us that in nomadic pastoralism too the same factors operate as in the forests for creating large social units. A number of households must share pastures in common, both around their summer and winter encampments; and their exclusive rights to these tracts need to be protected against intrusions by others.

The people whose tribal system had pastoral origins and must always be of great interest from the point of view of medieval Indian history are the Afghans.

The original area of the Afghans was the territory comprising mountains and tableland west of the highest peak of the Sulaiman range, the Takht-i Sulaiman (3,374 m.) situated on the NWFP-Baluchistan border in Pakistan. In the 1330s when Ibn Battūta found Kabul to be a mere village 'inhabited by a tribe of Persians called al-Afghan', he noted that the principal seat where their 'king' resided was the Sulaiman mountain.⁹ When the Afghans are first mentioned as a people, in the earliest Persian work on geography, the *Hudūdu'l 'Ālam*, written in the tenth century, they are said to inhabit 'Saul, a pleasant village on a mountain', which Minorsky places in the Farmal district not far from the Takht-i Sulaiman.¹⁰ It may be recalled that though there is no earlier mention of the Afghans, 'Afghan' as the name of a district or region appears in a seventh-century account of the travels of Xuan Zhwang (Hsuan Tsang), appearing in Watters' transcription as 'A-po-kan'.¹¹ The territory was south of Jaguda or Zabul (capital: Ghazni), and therefore, again in the area where the *Hudūdu'l 'Ālam* had located its Afghan settlement. The name stuck to that restricted area in the form of Afghanistan (with the inevitable Persian territorial suffix *-stan*), so that Babur places it south of Kabul, distinct from Kohat, Bannu, Naghz, and Farmal, but north of Duki (N.E. Baluchistan).¹² Babur adds significantly that this tract contained *dasht* or steppe plains or tableland.

Such early information as we have therefore puts the Afghans in an area where pastoralism must have furnished their principal means of sustenance. This is shown by the detailed territorial breakdown of taxation within the province of Qandahar (to which the original Afghan territory would have belonged) in Abul Fazl's *Ā'in-i Akbarī* (1595). Here Afghan tribes are shown as the principal tax-payers in localities of the eastern and southern (or rather south-eastern) divisions of the province and in Qalat-i Tarnauk to the north of Qandahar. In most of these localities the larger amount of tax was paid in the form of sheep. The total annual collection of sheep from localities where Afghan tribes are specifically mentioned as the tax-payers amounted to 26,421 heads of sheep.¹³

The Afghans have remained in this territory inhabited by them since ancient times, but by the sixteenth century they had extended considerably into territory northward. We have seen how Ibn Battūta in the fourteenth century noted their settlement at Kabul, and Babur's memoirs and Abul Fazl's *Ā'in-i Akbarī* both show the Afghans established in the territory stretching eastward from Kabul to the Indus. A tradition of such northward migration was preserved in respect of the Afghan tribe of Yūsūfzaīs. Their original 'encampments' (*yurt*) and native places were between Qandahar and Qarabagh (south of Ghazni). During the time when Ulugh Beg Kabuli ruled over Kabul (1469-1502), they migrated into Kabul, moving on eastwards into Lamghan, then onwards to Kashghar

(Chitral), finally settling in Swad (Swat river basin) and Bajaur (Panjkora valley). There they overthrew local chiefs called 'sultans' who claimed an ancient lineage, the latter event occurring a hundred years before the mention of this tradition in an official Mughal history in 1667–68.¹⁴ The migrations were thus not necessarily peaceful enterprises, and might be one important factor behind the Afghans being organized in tribes.

Afghan migrations into the Indian plains also began in the thirteenth century;¹⁵ and although these migration have their own importance in history, this is not a matter with which we are here concerned.

The division of Afghans into a multiplicity of tribes seems to have proceeded along with their expansion northwards. There is no mention of any named Afghan tribe in our sources until the fifteenth century when the Lodis appear as the rulers of Delhi (1451–1526). In their homeland the mention of individual tribes comes from Babur, who had seized Kabul in 1504. The Mahmands inhabited the vicinity of Kabul;¹⁶ the Dilazak, Yusufzai, and Gagiyanī were in Kohat;¹⁷ and the Kurani, Kiwi, Sur, Isakhail, and Niyazi in the Bannu territory.¹⁸

Towards the close of the same century, Abul Fazl in the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, not only gives a number of names of Afghan tribes in both the Kabul and Qandahar provinces, but also the traditional explanation of the rise of the Afghan tribes, in which common ancestry is held to play the main part.

The traditional progenitor was, then, a person (from Bani Israel) called Afghan. He had three sons who became the ancestors of the three tribal federations (*ulūs*) of Sarbani, Gharghashti, and Batani, respectively named after them. From their descendants arose, as subdivisions, various tribes, which Abul Fazl goes on to list under each of the three original tribes. The Mahmand and Yusufzai belong, for example, to the Sarbani group; the Afridi and Khatak to the Gharghashtis; and the Ghilzai and Niyazi to the Batanis. Abul Fazl cannot hold himself from recording the kind of variations in tradition that perhaps originate from inter-tribal rivalries: the Ghilzais, Lodis, and Sarwanis, from the Batani group, were really not descended from Batan through the male line, but out of issues of the union of a Ghor chief Mast Ali (Mati) with a daughter of Batan, an illicit wedlock, only later legitimized.¹⁹ Detailed expositions of these traditions began to appear in the seventeenth century, notably in Ni'matullāh's *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, completed in 1613, and dedicated to Jahangir's leading Afghan noble, Khān Jahān Lodī.²⁰

The assumption in these genealogical lists is that an Afghan must belong to one of the recognized tribes. But by c.1500 the Afghans were also associated with a language of their own, termed *Afghānī* by Bābur.²¹ It was said in an early source of Sher Shāh Sūr (1540–45) that he spoke to Afghans in 'the *Afghānī* language' and favoured those who spoke it well.²² Like Bābur, Abul Fazl too lists *Afghānī* among the languages spoken in Kabul.²³ *Afghānī* is first identified with Pashto in mid-seventeenth century by the author of the *Dabistān-i Mazāhib*, who says of Bāyazīd (d.1572), the Raushani prophet, that he authored several works in 'Arabic, Persian, Hindi and *Afghānī*', and then says that his major work *Khairu'l Bayān* was in four versions: 'first, in Arabic; second in Persian; third, in Hindi; fourth, Pashto'.²⁴ This also explains the currency of the name Pathan (variant of Pashton/Pakhtun), as a substitute for Afghan. In 1581 Monserrate, accompanying Akbar from Khyber to Kabul, found the inhabitants around Jalalabad to be 'these Patanei, whom the Mongols [Mughals] call Aufgans'.²⁵ Genealogical tradition obviously sought to accommodate the language-based identity of the Pathan with the tribe-based community of Afghan by giving to the common ancestor (the father of Sarban, Batan, and Gharghasht) the name Qais 'Abdur Rashīd and the title 'Pathan' by the early seventeenth century.²⁶

There were apparently still some populations that presumably did not speak the same language as the Afghans and were not accepted as Afghans by many. Such were the Farmalis and Khitais, who respectively treated themselves as subdivisions of the Gharghashti and Batani, though their claims to this status were not recognized in the established genealogies (or at least those that 'Ināyatullāh accepted).²⁷ Such differences, however, did not cloud the fact that the Afghans, united by language, were further marked by a system of tribes that practically embraced each one of them.

As the genealogies show, the tribes were held together by notions of common descent, normally through the paternal line. But there was little insistence on endogamy. Indeed, as many as eleven divisions of major tribes arose out of the unions of non-Afghan males with Afghan maidens, such as Bakhtyars and Ishtaranis among Sheranis, and Sayyidzai among Tarins. The most prominent among these was the Mati group of tribes among the Batanis, whose origin we have already discussed. In all these exceptional cases, the affiliation to the larger tribe was through the female ancestor, though there was an effort to exalt her husband's status by making him a Saiyid.²⁸

Marriages also occurred among members of different tribes. Thus Sherani, the progenitor of the Sheranis, was the son of a daughter of Kakar of the Gharghashti tribe, while his father was a Sarbani chief. Ill-treated at his father's home, he joined his maternal grandfather, and declared himself a Gharghashti. He was accepted as such and ultimately established a separate division (*tuman*) alongside that of Kakar within the Gharghashtis.²⁹ Here we see a process of adoption as well, reminding us of the *mawālī* or 'clients' of the early Arab tribes. There is here, then, a marked difference from the Indian caste system.

We have argued earlier that the tribal system of the Afghans probably originated in areas where pastoral economy was important, and it was sustained by the needs of collective action as they migrated northwards. It is true that in many localities both in the south and the north, they practised agriculture as well, and some communities were exclusively peasants. Around Jalalabad, to the west of the Khyber Pass, the 'Patanei', also called 'Aufgan', Monserrate observed in 1581, lived 'by agriculture', being 'miserably off for draught animals and ferry boats'.³⁰ Babur had also noted that the Afghan tribes, Kurani, Kiwi, Sur, Isakhel, and Niyazi, carried on cultivation in the Bannu territory.³¹ Elphinstone, in his detailed account of agrarian relations in the Afghan lands, based on observations and information mainly gathered in 1809, speaks only of personal property in agricultural lands, and nowhere refers to any common tribal claims to such land, as one would expect in respect of pastures.³² Cultivation could, however, be combined in many areas with pastoral pursuits, as Elphinstone noted in his account of the Yusufzais and Ghilzais.³³

Alongside agriculture, trade became increasingly important in the life of the Afghans. Babur writes of his troops' plunder of 'flocks, cloth and horses bred for trade' in Afghan villages, of the seizure of 'white cloths, aromatic roots, high-quality horses and horses bred for trade' from Afghan merchants on the roads, and of his men killing *Khawāja Khizr Nūhānī*, 'a famous and creditworthy Afghan merchant', all in a single expedition into Kohat and Bannu territory in 1504–5.³⁴ 'Abbas Sarwānī claimed that owing to favours received from Sher Shāh (1504–45) 'no Afghan in Hind or Roh [the hilly homeland] remained poor, and [all] became merchants'.³⁵

An idealized picture of tribes based on this union of agriculture with trade was presented by the seventeenth-century text, *Afsāna-i Shāhān*:

First, the Afghans traded in horses; they brought horses from *Wilayat* [Afghanistan] and fattened and reared them at Bajwara [Jalandhar Doab, Punjab], since all things were cheap at Bajwara,

whether grain or green stuff, and then, scattering themselves in Hindustan, sold them. Their homes were in Roh [hilly country]. This [trade] was the source of livelihood of the Afghans there. Such land as there was, was distributed among brothers; they cultivated it and ate off it. None inflicted any hardship on anyone. They were not subject to anyone, nor was there any royal control. They are there still and live in this manner. [Couplet omitted.] They passed their time thus. Over each tribe there was a chief whose word they obeyed. They carried on trade, and there was no master over them, nor any royal control.³⁶

Both agriculture and trade subsisted on individual property, a condition different from collective claims on land under nomadism. But sedentary and commercial life inevitably gave rise to conditions of social hierarchy. This can be seen best in the account of the Yusufzais given by Elphinstone at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Yusufzais carried on agriculture in Swat as landowning peasants; but more numerous than they were their faqīrs, indigent 'villains', who were labourers and shepherds tied to individual Yusufzai peasants, held to be their *khāwands* or masters. The faqīrs were placed outside the tribe, not entitled to participate in the *jirga* or tribal assembly. Their conditions were not worse than they were because of the possibility of flight to another ulūs or division of the Yusufzai, who would be happy to add to their stock of faqīrs. The tribal *khān* took no revenue from his clan, but taxed the faqīrs.³⁷ The Yusufzais were a large tribe—Elphinstone estimated their number (including faqīrs and dependants) at about 700,000³⁸—but such rigorous stratification does not seem to have prevailed among the other Afghans.³⁹ However, some form of property-based hierarchy must have prevailed everywhere, and the tribe provided the primitive institutions of custom and coercion, by which it was preserved and furthered.

Pre-modern sources tell us little about the internal functioning of an Afghan tribe. Genealogical traditions, as recorded by Ni'matullāh early in the seventeenth century may help us only a little here. The point in the story of Sherani, son of Sharjunun, head of the Sarbani tribe, is that, being the eldest son, he expected to succeed Sharjunun as the malik or chief of the tribe; but Sharjunun decided otherwise, conferring the succession upon the eldest son of his second wife.⁴⁰ Any intervention of a tribal assemblage in matters of succession does not find a place in these traditions. Indeed, the term *jirga* is not even mentioned.

This does not mean, however, that the *jirga* did not exist. That this was quite a common tribal institution was observed by Elphinstone in 1809: he even argued that 'the clannish attachment of the Afghans, unlike the Highlanders is rather to the community than to the chief'.⁴¹ The *jirga* ('jeerga') was an essential instrument for inter-tribal consultation and action.⁴² Judicial cases went before 'a Jeerga which is composed of Khauns, Mulliks or elders, assisted by Moollahs, and even by grave and experienced persons of inferior rank to those'.⁴³ In many cases, however, powerful chiefs, or *khāns*, would simply act without caring to call a *jirga*. It was, in any case, not an institution of democracy, but represented a kind of primitive aristocracy.

The Afghan tribes are undoubtedly those on which historical records of South Asia shed the most light. Their history enables us to see that there is no single model to which tribes conform. From the expansion and multiplication of Afghan tribes, we can also infer that tribal communities were neither stable nor immutable. Some areas of Afghan history undoubtedly remain dark. We know that the adoption of agriculture and trade must have been very important processes within the Afghan tribes, but we do not know whether these substantively transformed the tribal organization or fundamentally altered their social customs.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 *Baburnama*, (edited by Eiji Mano) (Kyoto: 1995), p. 466; *Baburnama* (translated by A.S. Beveridge) (London: 1921), vol. II, p. 518.
- 2 Cf. Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (Chicago: 1970), pp. 205–08. Dumont's 'Brahmanical' view of caste makes it more difficult for him to recognize the Muslim communities in question as castes, than it is for ordinary people, both Hindu and Muslim, who freely speak of them as 'castes' (Hindustani *zat*).
- 3 *Nuskha-i Dilkusha*, British Library (London) MS. Or. 23, pp. 103a–b.
- 4 For a summary of information about them, J.H. Hutton, *Caste in India* (4th edition, London: 1963), pp. 8–9.
- 5 Muhammad Kāzīm, *Ālamgīrnāma* (edited by Khadim Husain and Abdul Hai) (Calcutta: 1865–73, pp. 722, 724–5).
- 6 This appears from the passage quoted from the *Ālamgīrnāma*. *Nang* corresponds to *nanga* in Hindustani.
- 7 Hutton, *Caste in India*, p. 28.
- 8 Quoted above: note 1 for references.
- 9 H.A.R. Gibb (tr.), *The Travels of Ibn Battuta* (New Delhi: 1993 [reprint]), vol. III, p.590. Gibb consistently renders *malik* in the Arabic text as 'king', although in India at this time it signified a noble, and, as we would see, among the Afghans, meant simply a chief. Ibn Battuta's description of the Afghans as 'Persian' implies no more than that they were speakers of an Iranic dialect.
- 10 V. Minorsky (tr.), *Hudud al-'Alam: the Regions of the World* (London: 1937) pp. 30, 91, 251, 252. Minorsky goes too far when he situates the Afghans, mentioned in the *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam*, in 'the southernmost part of Afghanistan' (p. 252).
- 11 Hui-Li, *The Life of Hsuan Tsang* (translated by Li Yung Lsi) (Peking: 1959), p. 188. Cf. Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India, 629–645 AD* (edited by Rhys Davids and S.W. Bushel) (London: 1905), vol. II, p. 265.
- 12 *Bāburnāma* (Turki text), ed. Mano, pp.198, 214, 219; Beveridge, vol. I, pp. 200, 218, 223.
- 13 Abul Fazl, *Ā'in-i Akbarī* (edited by H. Blochmann) (Calcutta: 1867–77), vol. I, pp. 588–9.
- 14 Muḥammad Kāzīm, *Ālamgīrnāma*, pp. 1039–40. For a more recent statement of the same tradition, Mountstuart Elphinstone, *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul* (London: 1839) vol. II, pp. 9–11; H.W. Bellew, *From the Indus to the Tigris* (London: 1874, p. 124).
- 15 On this subject, Iqbal Husain, *The Ruhela Chieftaincies* (Delhi: 1994), pp. 1–18.
- 16 *Bāburnāma*, Mano, p. 217; Beveridge, vol. I, p. 221.
- 17 *Bāburnāma*, Mano, p. 226; Beveridge, vol. I, p. 231. The original text has *Gayānī*, not *Gagiyānī*.
- 18 *Bāburnāma*, Mano, p. 228; Beveridge, vol. I, p. 233. The *Sur* are spelt *Su* in the text, while Beveridge reads *Nia-zai* for *Niyazi* in the text.
- 19 *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, vol. I, p. 591.
- 20 Edited by S.M. Imam Al-Din, Dacca, 2 vols, 1960 and 1962. The Afghan geneology is set out in vol. II, pp. 548–50. It is curious that Ni'matullah repeats with greater elaboration (pp.594–601) the story of the illicit relationship that the ancestor of the Ghilzais, Sarwanis, and Lodis, whom he names Shāh Ḥusain of Ghor, contracted with Mattū, daughter of Shaikh Bait, chief of the Batani clan. The name 'Mati' for the group of three tribes in this variant of the story, is derived from her rather than from her husband. The tradition of such an origin must have been very widely current, for otherwise Ni'matullāh would have hardly recorded it: it was not likely to have commended itself to his patron, a Lodi.
- 21 *Bāburnāma*, Mano, p. 203; Beveridge, vol. I, p. 207. Bābur also quotes an 'Afghān' word *liyar* for road (Mano, p.228; Beveridge, vol. I, p. 233).
- 22 'Abbās Khān Sarwānī, *Tuhfa-i Akbarshāhī* (written c.1586), India Office MS, Ethe 219, p. 105b.
- 23 *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, vol. I, p.591. By a mistake going back to Gladwin, where the text has Afghani followed by Pushai, H.S. Jarrett in his translation of the *Ā'in-i Akbarī* ([edited by J. Sarkar] [Calcutta: 1949], vol. II, p. 591, reads the latter as 'Pushtu', thus making Afghani and Pushto separate languages.
- 24 Kaikhusrāu Isfandiyār, *Dabistān-i Mazāhib* (edited by Rahim Rizazada Malik) (Teheran: A.H. 1342 Solar), vol. I, p. 283. The name of Pashto for the language of the Afghans occurs still earlier in the *Tārīkh-i Khanjahānī* of Ni'matullāh, vol. II, p. 603, where it is explained that the name of the famous Afghan tribe Lodi means 'very excellent' in the Pashto language. Pashto is an Iranian language, which, as we have noted, partly explains Ibn Battūta describing the Afghans as a 'Persian tribe' nearly 300 years earlier (Gibb, *Travels of Ibn Batula*, vol. III, p. 590).
- 25 Fr A. Monserrate, *Commentary on his Journey to the Court of Akbar* (translated by J.S. Hoyland; annotated by

- S. Banerjee) (Cuttack: 1922), p. 149. This early statement hardly conforms to the assertion in Jos J.L. Gommans, *The Rise of Indo-Afghan Empire* (Delhi: 1999, p. 9), that 'the name *Pathan* mostly refers to an Indian context'.
- 26 Ni'matullāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, vol. II, pp. 548, 650. Less than twenty years earlier, Abul Fazl had called the same personage by the simple name 'Afghan' (*Ain-i Akbari*, vol. I, p. 591).
- 27 Ni'matullāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, vol. II, pp. 649–50, Elphinstone, *Kingdom of Caubul*, vol. I, p. 411, classes the 'Fermoolees' among the 'Taujiks', so that Pashto not being their mother-tongue might be the reason for their exclusion from the Afghan tribes.
- 28 Ibid., vol. II, pp. 648–9.
- 29 Ibid., vol. II, pp. 551–4.
- 30 Monserrate, *Commentary*, p. 149.
- 31 *Bāburnāma*, Mano, p. 228; Beveridge, vol. I, p. 233.
- 32 Elphinstone, *Kingdom of Caubul*, vol. I, pp. 389–91.
- 33 Ibid., vol. II, pp. 108–9, 145. Also vol. I, p. 303, where Elphinstone speaks of some people who were at a stage midway between moving with the flock according to seasons and living in permanent houses where they cultivated.
- 34 *Bāburnāma*, Mano, p. 230; Beveridge, vol. I, p. 235.
- 35 'Abbās Khān, *Tuhfa-i Akbarshāhī*, MS Ethe 219, p. 113b.
- 36 Muḥammad Kabīr, *Afsāna-i Shāhān*, British Library Add. 24,409, p. 5a.
- 37 Elphinstone, *Kingdom of Caubul*, vol. II, pp. 26–9.
- 38 Ibid., vol. II, p. 27. As Elphinstone notes, the traditional number for the Yusufzai was 9,00,000. Ni'matullāh, *Tārīkh-i Khānjahānī*, vol. II, p. 577, says, indeed, that they were called 'Nuh-lakh', or Nine Lakhs.
- 39 Cf. *ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 390–91.
- 40 Ibid., vol. II, pp. 551–2.
- 41 Elphinstone, *Kingdom of Caubul*, vol. I, p. 217.
- 42 Ibid., vol. I, p. 218.
- 43 Ibid., vol. I, p. 222.

CHAPTER 24

The Village Community

Irfan Habib

The term 'village community' has been much used in historical writing, even though its precise definition often remains elusive. The village itself can be defined as a settlement essentially of peasants who gather to live together for better security and for the convenience of exchanging essential goods and services among themselves. In pre-modern agricultural societies the size of a village was ordinarily restricted by the distances at which the peasants' fields could be reached without undue exertion. If the village increased in size so that some peasants had to have fields placed at inconveniently long distances, it is likely that a fresh nucleus would then be chosen for such peasants to set up their huts or cottages in. At times when fields were periodically abandoned by peasants to shift to new land that would initially be more fertile, one could expect the villages to be much smaller in size than they would be when all the arable land was simultaneously cultivated. This is perhaps one reason why the number of villages does not appear to have increased (in some areas it appears to have actually declined) since Mughal times, though the population has increased massively since then.¹ The small size of the average pre-colonial Indian village is well reflected in the small number of *āsāmīs* or cultivators in the villages given in five seventeenth-century documents from Haryana and Rajasthan, the numbers ranging from thirty-eight to 114 per village, yielding an average of fifty-seven only.² It is true that in the late fourteenth century 'Afīf speaks of villages around Delhi containing 200 or more men each, but this must contain a considerable element of exaggeration.³

These small numbers must be borne in mind when we are looking for the kind of social ties among the village inhabitants that could transform the village from a mere settlement into a community: smaller numbers could always facilitate closer ties. What would be the nature of these ties is another question. For there is no single pattern of peasant communities. In Peru the *ayllu* was based on kinship, the village population being bound by endogamy; and there was communal cultivation, pasture and forest.⁴ In Russia a rough egalitarianism existed, but kinship played no part in it. Arable land was assigned to individual families for long periods, and meadows on an annual basis. The male heads of all families

constituted the assemblage that settled these matters. Cattle and horses were individually owned, however; and these were a source of considerable economic differentiation within the 'community'.⁵ The Japanese 'community' was, in contrast, based on a rigid social differentiation. It was practically a corporate body of propertied families (*hyakusho*), with a 'five-man' group (*goningumi*), which along with the headman took all the decisions. The tenant-farmers and landless labourers were placed in an abjectly semi-servile status.⁶ Looking at this variety, one can only say that a village community can be deemed to exist wherever some institutional or social networks arise within the village involving its entire population in some form of cooperation and/or dependence. Neither equality nor democracy can thus be taken to be an essential characteristic of the village community. This should serve as a warning that our perception of the Indian village community (or communities, for the nature of social ties in the village could vary over both space and time) must emerge out of the evidence we have rather than from any particular model that we may set for it to conform to.

I

What may perhaps be the earliest evidence of the functioning of the Indian village community is contained in the *Milindapanho* (Questions of Menander), the famous Buddhist text of the first or second century AD. Here, Nāgasena explains to king Menander how the sense of a word changes with context by citing the example of the word 'villagers' (*gamika*):

Suppose, O King, that in some village the chief of the village (*gāmasāmiko*) were to order the crier (*āṇāpaka*), saying: 'Go, crier, bring all the villagers (*gāmikā*) quickly together before me.' And he, in obedience to that order, were to stand in the midst of the village and were thrice to call out: 'Let all the villagers assemble in the presence of the chief (*sāmi*)!' And they should assemble in haste and have the crier make this announcement to the village chief (*gāmasāmika*): 'All the villagers (*gāmikā*), sir, have assembled. Do now whatsoever you require.' Now when the village chief (*gāmasāmiko*), O King, is thus summoning all the 'heads of houses' (*kuṭipurise*), he issues his orders to all the villagers (*gāmike*), but it is not they who assemble in obedience to the order: it is the 'heads of houses' (*kuṭi-purisā*) who come. And the village chief (*gāmasāmiko*) is satisfied therewith, knowing that such is the number of his 'villagers' (*gāmikā*). There are many others who do not come: women, men, slave girls (*dāsī*), men slaves (*dāsā*), hired labourers (*bhatakā*), servants (*kammakarā*), [ordinary] villagers (*gāmikā*), sick people, oxen, buffaloes, sheep, goats, and dogs—but all these do not count. It was with reference to the 'heads of houses' (*kuṭipurise*) that the order was issued in the words: Let all assemble.⁷

This passage makes it clear that the village headman used to get the more substantial villagers, the *kuṭipurise* only, to assemble to discuss village matters. Ordinary peasants, labourers, and women were excluded.

We are thus already dealing with a socially stratified village, in which the matters of the village are decided only by the upper stratum. Evidence for such stratification comes from elsewhere in the *Milindapanho* itself. It tells us how a peasant (*kassako*) working hard in his field would become the possessor of much flour (*bahudhannako*), and thereby become dominant over 'whosoever are poor and needy [and are] reduced to beggary and misery'.⁸

The *Kāmasutra*, now usually assigned to the mid-second century AD, and thus nearly contemporaneous with the *Milindapanho*, speaks of how the village chief (*gramadhipati*), official (*ayukta*) and the plough-owner's son (*halothhavrittputrasya*)⁹ could have access to

women while they were rendering forced labour, entering their house, bringing in or taking out material, repairing/cleaning the house, working in the fields, taking out cotton, wool, flax, hemp, and tree bark, and bringing in yarn, selling or purchasing, etc.¹⁰ Here we see the upper-stratum peasant sharing with the village headman the entitlement to levy forced labour, and enjoying resources enough to employ wage labour in the fields and house, and to 'put out' cotton, etc. among ordinary peasant women so as to get yarn in return. In other words, we have a system of sub-exploitation in existence, of which the 'community' of the higher strata could be an established instrument.

It was not for nothing, then, that those who, Altekar thinks, gathered in the 'primary village assembly' were called '*mahattamas* in UP, *mahattaras* in Maharashtra, *mahajanas* in Karnataka and *perumakkal* in Tamil country, all mean[ing] the same thing, "Great Men of the Village".¹¹

Inevitably, the stratification was closely linked with caste. A stone slab inscription of 1173 AD from Ghazipur district (eastern Uttar Pradesh) records the decisions of a body of Brahmans assembled in a village, prescribing a rule (*sthiti*) agreed to by all (*samvid*), whereby robbers and cattle-thieves within the village were to be most severely punished, and any instigators be treated as 'a dog, or Chaṇḍāla or an ass'.¹² The position of the 'menial' castes in such a community can be imagined from this expression.

But it is from southern India, especially from the period of the Cholas during the tenth to thirteenth centuries, that a very large amount of our information about the 'assemblies' (*sabha*, *mahasabha*) in the brahmadeya (Brahman-held) villages is derived. These have deservedly received much scholarly attention. We have the descriptions by the doyen of south Indian history, S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar and his successors. R.C. Majumdar gave an analytical account, marked by a careful gathering of evidence that pertains specifically to the Brahmanical assemblies.¹³ Burton Stein devotes a whole chapter in his influential book on medieval south Indian polity and society to 'the Coromandel *Brahmadeya* Village'.¹⁴ Much new light has now been shed by the careful researches of Nobura Karashima and Y. Subbarayalu.¹⁵

There is no doubt that the Brahman village assemblies of the great Chola period, with their detailed rules of 'election' and rotation, restrictions to prevent over-representation of individual families, their professed regard for theological learning as qualification for membership, and their committees for different functions, still stand unique. In other matters, such as the assembly's status as a corporate person, receiving and disposing of income, exercising control over wasteland, acting as the trustee of endowments, imposing fines, etc., the Brahman communities of the Chola period had their counterparts in Karnataka, which are, however, illuminated in rather dimmer light by inscriptions, though they left behind rather well-regulated survivals in Goa.¹⁶

These communities, we must also remember were limited in their territorial extent. These were not only of Brahmans, but of such Brahmans as held land that was tax-exempt or taxed at very concessional rates. Thus the 'assembly' of the brahmadeya villages was not only one of superior landholders but of land grantees. By the very nature of being tax exempt, the brahmadeya communities took the form of rentiers' corporation: such a situation could not exist in the vast majority of villages, which had not been granted away by the state to the Brahmans.¹⁷ It is not surprising, then, that land could assume the full form of private property in these numerically few brahmadeya villages, with transfers by sale occurring precisely where the community structure seems to assume its most constitutional form, while such transfers are practically absent elsewhere during the period of the great Cholas (tenth and eleventh centuries).

What the actual conditions of the community were in the ordinary villages (*ur*) is less clear. They could have had an assembly, also designated *ur*, but with the heavy taxation by which the village would be burdened. One can imagine why its privileges would be far more limited than those of the Brahmanical *sabha* or *mahajan*. But whether, unlike the Brahman-held villages, these ordinary villages had communal landholding (as argued by Y. Subbarayalu)¹⁸ may well be doubted. Land sales did not take place (an inference from their absence in record) in early Chola times, not perhaps because of communal possession, but because after tax it would not yield enough surplus to give it a price. In other words, we are likely to have here individual field cultivation, but not individual ownership.

If things changed in the twelfth century, as both Karashima and Subbarayalu have urged, and big landlords or *kaniyalar* appear in the *ur* villages, the reason need not only be an inflow of wealth in the hands of certain warrior classes by which they could purchase land.¹⁹ There could also have been a weakening of the tax collection machinery with the decline of the Chola state, which would provide space for private surplus appropriators. There could also be growth of internal stratification through both economic and social factors. Subbarayalu identifies a stratum of 'tenant cultivators' (*kudi*), which could have arisen because of both growing market relations and the elaboration of caste hierarchies. The *paraiya* or untouchable castes provided cheap or forced agricultural labour, which too could facilitate landlord cultivation. And there were also slaves.²⁰

The new conditions must have affected the structure of the village 'community', as the emerging upper elements took over control of the villages. This could not take place without causing social tension, a fact which explains the remarkable revolt in 1429, when all the Right Hand and Left Hand castes in a large part of Tamil Nadu rose and issued a proclamation pronouncing their resolve to unitedly oppose oppressions of the *vanniya* (warriors), *jivitakkarar* (official tenure holders), and the Brahman and Vellala *kaniyalar*.²¹

There is one aspect of the village community that south Indian inscriptions—to judge from secondary studies—do not shed much light on. This concerns the maintenance of village servants and artisans. A Gujarat document assignable to the ninth century, reproduced in the *Lekhapaddhati*, however, speaks of the five workmen (*pancha-karuka*), namely, 'the carpenter, ironsmith, potter, etc.', who were entitled to receive handfuls of grain from individual peasants at harvest times.²² This was what in subsequent times in the Deccan would be called *baluta*.

Along with claims on harvests, the village servants could claim tax-exempt lands as well. Ziyā Baranī (1357) tells us how the *khots*, or village headmen, enjoyed tax-free lands before 'Alāuddīn Khaljī (1296–1316) and had this privilege restored to them under Ghiyāṣuddīn Tughluq (1320–24), who believed that they must enjoy this benefit if they were to carry out the functions attached to their position.²³ It would seem that the *balahar*, the menial village messenger and servant,²⁴ too similarly enjoyed a (doubtlessly small) land allotment tax free. This lends particular weight to Baranī's well-known statement that 'Alāuddīn Khaljī decided that henceforth 'there was one rule regarding payment of land tax in respect of every one, whether *khof* or *balāhar*'; or, again, that in paying land tax rated at half the produce 'there should be no difference between *khots* and *balāhars*'.²⁵

In 1510 the Portuguese seized Goa from the sultan of Bijapur. They found the village communities in functioning order, and in 1526 the regulations made for them provided that

gancars [*gaonkars*, village headmen, principal landholders] can give rent-free lands, be they waste or cultivated, to the village servants, i.e. the temple Brahman, the 'gate-keeper' [*porteiro* watchman,

presumably], the 'rendeiro' [bailiff?], the washerman, cobbler, carpenter, blacksmith, temple-sweeper, dancing girls and the 'chocarreiro' [?]. These persons get rent-free holdings as the recompense for their services. The grants are irrevocable, nor can any servant be removed and another put in his place; for the servant is hereditary, and the grant is to him, his son, grandson, etc. Nor can servants be appointed other than the above. . . named, nor can they have free lands. Should such a grant lapse from failure of heirs, another man of the same profession must be put in to fill his place.²⁶

Here, then, we have not only land allotments of village servants and artisans, but that 'unalterable division of labour' of which Marx speaks, set by the Indian system of castes, and which he held to be a special feature of the Indian village communities.²⁷

The picture we have constructed thus far of Indian village communities before the onset of the Mughal age is built up of fragments of historical evidence widely scattered in space and time. It is therefore vulnerable to the objection that we may be artificially synthesizing local exceptions and mutually discrepant elements to produce a purely 'imagined community' that either never actually existed on the ground, or, if it did, then only in certain localities. The only answer that can be given to this possible criticism is to urge that when in the Mughal times larger evidence does become available, the information it supplies is broadly consistent with the perception of the village community we have sought to reconstruct above for earlier times.

II

For the village community as an institution in Mughal India, we may begin with the official Mughal regulations since it can be a fair assumption that what they recognize or prescribe would be of more than local or provincial significance.

It should, of course, come as no surprise to us that for the Mughal administration the village constituted a fiscal unit, for the purposes of both assessment and collection of land revenue.²⁸ What transpired within this unit, that is, the determination of the share of the individual peasant (*asami*) and its collection, was not, however, normally the function of the state's officials. Rather, it was the function of the headmen (*muqaddams*), whose position was hereditary;²⁹ and the accounts of what was assessed on individual peasants, collected from them, and paid to the state's officials was kept by another hereditary village worthy, the *patwari*. He is described by Abul Fazl as 'an accountant from the side of the peasants: he records the expenditure [tax payments] and income [tax collections]; and there is no village without him'.³⁰ The village had thus an internal traditional machinery of its own, which, though subordinate to the state, was not a part of it.

Since the *patwari's* papers were sometimes seized and used to verify the official revenue collectors' accounts of their collections, some Mughal administrative and accountancy manuals contain reproductions or abridgements of such accounts as specimens, and these reveal to us the existence of a financial pool of the village, functioning as a corporate body. We find a village taking a large loan from a *mahajan* or moneylender, and then repaying it out of its income, which was made up of tax payments from individual peasants. Clearly, the loan must have been taken earlier to meet the tax demand on the village as a whole. Other items on the payments side included 'village expenses' (*kharj-i deh*) on items such as costs of damming water channels (*nālas*), buying musk-melon seeds, or paying visiting jugglers and minstrels, or entertaining strangers.³¹

What official regulations do not clearly indicate is how this financial pool was managed, and whose interest (whether of the village body as a whole or only a part of it) the internal community structure was designed to serve. Mughal official pronouncements are, however, replete with suspicions of the oppression that the 'big men' (*kalāntarān*) of the village could commit on their weaker brethren, especially in the matter of distribution of the tax obligation.³² This leaves us in little doubt that the natural condition of the village community, in the official view, was one of oligarchy, not of equality or democracy.

This inference is definitively reinforced by the extraordinary collection of documents preserved at Brindavan (near Mathura, Uttar Pradesh), and rescued mainly by the devoted efforts of the late Tarapada Mukherjee and his colleagues. Dating from the sixteenth century, we have here a number of documents in Persian and Braj languages dealing with the sale of village lands and related matters at Brindavan and its vicinity for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We find, first of all, that those who are described as headmen (*muqaddams*) in the Persian documents appear in the corresponding Braj versions as *panch* or *panch-muqaddams*. In these documents the number of the *panch-muqaddams* is usually five and above, and even exceeds twelve or thirteen. In a Braj document of 1594, they all claim 'to act in concert' (*sab panchan milikare*).

In the villages that were to be submerged later in the township of Brindavan, the *panch* seem to have been predominantly of the Gaurava caste; one Muslim, 'Ali *Khān*, appearing among the *panch* in 1654 was a Gaurava convert. But three Muslim names occur among the *panch* as early as 1594; and they might or might not have been first-generation converts or might not even have belonged to the same caste as the rest of the *panch*. In 1641 *Bārī Khān* headed the *panch* of village Aritha, another Gaurava village, whereas earlier no Muslim name appeared among its *panch*. Thus, while caste ties and descent were important factors, a certain amount of heterogeneity and flexibility in their composition existed: the presence of Muslims among the *panch*, with the area being predominantly Hindu, is of particular interest, as showing that religion was no bar to the *panch* acting together.

Despite Baden-Powell's attempt to see the Indian village community as an extension of the joint family, no two *panch* in our documents appear to be descended from the same father or grandfather, and the genealogical chart that one is able to reconstruct of the family of Sandar Gaurava for over 100 years (1599 to 1712) shows that at any one time only one member of the family actually acted as *panch*. This reminds us of the anxiety in the Chola regulations of Brahman villages that no single family should be over-represented in the *sabhā*.

While the regulations of the Mughal administration prescribe clearly the obligations of the village headmen, which we now see means in the context of the village communities, the *panch*, or the village oligarchs, the Brindavan documents show the extent to which these oligarchs could collectively control 'village land' (*zamān-i mauza*). We find them selling vacant or wasteland (and in one case, the village pond). But all the numerous sales of fields of arable land are by individual peasants alone. It is to be inferred, then, that any land not cultivated or otherwise occupied belonged to the village, and it, therefore, lay in the hands of the *panch* to dispose of as they chose 'in concert'. It is generally not indicated where the money obtained by the *panch* through the sales of such land went. Presumably, it went to the financial pool of the village managed by the *panch*, since they also collectively lent out money, as they claim to have done (lending Rs 150 to a *bairāgi*) at Dosaich (Brindavan), according to a document of 1594. But in the same document the *panch* speak of distributing the price of vacated land sold by them (Rs. 20.5) among themselves, in whole or part, 'in proportionate shares' (*hissa-i rasad*).

Owing to their nature, the Brindavan documents bring the panch to light only in the context of land transfers. They have practically nothing on other aspects of the community, such as the maintenance of village artisans and servants. Only one document (of 1694) refers to 'the field of the chamārs' of village Rajpur (Brindavan), as if the leather-workers of that village were allowed a particular plot for their subsistence.³³ The terms on which they were so allowed are, however, not to be inferred from this brief reference. We have necessarily to turn to other documentation.

An Adil Shahi farman of 1665 from the Deccan does us much service by referring to 'the *vartana* of the *desāi*, *des-kulkarnī*, *nargonda*, *patel* [village headman], *kulkarnī* [village accountant] and the twelve *balūtiyas*'.³⁴ *Vartana* is the Marathi variant (later to be Arabicized into *waṭan*) of the Gujarati *vanṭh*, meaning tax-free land, and *balūta* was the payment in kind from harvest received by village servants and artisans, traditionally reckoned to be twelve in number.³⁵ In 1776 when the English had obtained the administration of Broach in Gujarat, the collector sent by them to oversee tax collections reported:

That a certain portion of land of each village is requisite to be set apart [tax free] for the maintenance of such artificers and labourers as are absolutely necessary for the common services of the village is, according to the custom of the country true.³⁶

In other words, both in the Deccan and Gujarat, not only were village artisans and servants allowed plots of land free to sustain themselves while offering either 'public' services (like removal of litter and carcasses, keeping watch at night, etc.) or individual services (like those of barber, carpenter and blacksmith) to villagers, but these allotments were also recognized by the government, which did not assess them for land tax. Obviously, such a concession could only be made if it was thought that such services were essential for the functioning of the village as an economic and social unit and, therefore, for sustaining its tax-paying capacity, the latter being naturally the government's main concern.

Nineteenth-century evidence shows that these conditions were general throughout India.³⁷ Even B.H. Baden-Powell recognized it as a universal phenomenon among both the kinds of villages he distinguished in India, the 'joint-villages' and the '*raiyaṭwari*'.³⁸

With W.H. Wiser's findings from his fieldwork in an Uttar Pradesh village,³⁹ many sociologists have come to espouse a rival concept, namely that of *jajmānī*, or the fixed relationship between hereditary 'specialists' and their individual clients, or *jajmāns*.⁴⁰ In this conception the village recedes as a social unit, and only the caste system remains; moreover, the framework restricts the relationship largely between the leading individual families of the dominant castes on the one hand, and the 'service' castes on the other.

There is no doubt that priests and astrologers had their fixed *jajmān* or client families, but this system must not be confused with the artisanal and other services secured by the village through land allotments. In an important study of eighteenth-century evidence from Maharashtra, Hiroshi Fukazawa has definitively established this distinction, despite his own very modest appraisal of his findings.⁴¹ What many sociologists have obviously failed to recognize is that the nineteenth-century British revenue settlements had helped carve out what could be seen in twentieth-century fieldwork. Once the village was no longer the conduit for tax payment, once individual landholding reigned supreme, and the village community atrophied, there was room left only for individual clients. It was only then that a *jajmān* system of the kind Wiser describes could have arisen. But by this time the village community no longer existed.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Cf. Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India (1556–1707)* (New Delhi: 1999 [2nd edition]), pp. 23–4. The comparison is made with the number of villages reported for various territories around 1901.
- 2 Ibid., pp. 139–40, for references to documents used for other information; the significance of the data for village size is not discussed.
- 3 Shams Sirāj 'Afif, *Tārīkh-i Firzshāhī* Bib. Ind., (Calcutta: 1890), p.95. Cf. T. Raychaudhuri and I. Habib, *Cambridge Economic History of India*, (Cambridge: 1982), p.48 and n.
- 4 S.A. Mason, *The Ancient Civilizations of Peru* (Harmondsworth: 1957), pp.170–75.
- 5 T. Shanin (ed.), *Late Marx and the Russian Road* (London: 1983), pp.11–12.
- 6 J.W. Hall and M.B. Jansen (eds), *Studies in the Institutional History of Early Modern Japan* (Princeton: 1968), pp.263–82, 301–14; J.W. Hall (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Japan* (Cambridge: 1991), pp.487–8.
- 7 *Milindapanho* (Pali) (edited by V. Trenckner) (London: [reprinted with index, etc.]), p. 147; also the T.W. Rhys Davids translation: *The Questions of Milinda* (Oxford: 1890), vol. 1, pp. 208–9. The Rhys Davids translation has been used, but with some modification.
- 8 *Milindapanho*, text, p.360; translation, (Oxford: 1894), vol. II, p. 269.
- 9 Literally, son of one who earns his livelihood by the plough.
- 10 Vatsayana, *Kamasutra*, 5.5:5, 6. I owe a precise rendering of this passage to Professor S.R. Sarma, Department of Sanskrit, Aligarh Muslim University.
- 11 S.A. Altekar, *State and Government in Ancient India* (Delhi: 1958 [3rd edition]), p. 228. Eleventh-century references to *brahmana mahajans* are cited by Sister M. Liceria, A.C., *Indian Historical Review*, vol. I, no. 1, pp. 32–3.
- 12 D.C. Sircar, 'Lahadpura Inscription of the Time of Jayachandra VS 1230', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. XXXII, pp. 305–9. The village 'Lahadpura' remains unidentified. As for the punishment to be meted out to thieves, what Sircar takes to mean 'slaughter at sight', R.C. Majumdar (*Corporate Life in Ancient India* [Calcutta: 1969 (3rd ed.)], pp.156–7) takes to mean 'blinded'. In either case, the Brahmins' pretensions to control over the ordinary villagers' life in Lahadpura seem to be absolute.
- 13 S.K. Aiyangar, *Ancient India and South Indian History and Culture* (Madras: 1941), vol. I, pp. 667–84; and K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas* (Madras: 1955), pp. 481–519. R.C. Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, pp. 145–99.
- 14 Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (Delhi: 1980), pp.141–72.
- 15 For the Brahman-governed 'communities' in Goa surviving into modern times, see D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Bombay: 1956), pp. 301–10.
- 16 Of 1,300 villages noted by Subbarayalu in Coromandel (Cholamandalam) only about 250 were brahmadeya villages, about fifty devadana (temple grant villages). The bulk of the remainder were ordinary, taxed villages. Stein, *Peasant State and Society*, p. 123.
- 17 N. Karashima, *Socio-Cultural Change in Villages in the Tiruchirapalli District*, (Tokyo: 1983), vol. I, p. 71.
- 18 Ibid., p. 142.
- 19 Ibid., pp. 142–3.
- 20 Ibid., pp.125–6; Noboru Karashima, *Towards a New Formation: South Indian Society Under Vijayanagar Rule* (Delhi: 1992), pp. 117–30.
- 21 Ibid., *Towards a New Formation*, pp.140–58; *ibid.*, *Socio-Cultural Change*, vol. I, pp. 127–8, 133–59. This incident was previously wrongly assumed by some scholars to have taken place in the thirteenth century.
- 22 Cf. B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture in Northern India in Twelfth Century* (Allahabad: 1973), p. 267. The words quoted by Yadava, p. 308, n.186, do not include barber and washerman.
- 23 *Tarikh-i Firozshahi* (edited by Saiyid Ahmad Khan, W. Nassau Lees and Kabir al-Din) (Calcutta: 1862), pp. 287, 430.
- 24 Cf. Henry M. Elliot, *Memoirs of the Races of North-Western Provinces of India* (edited by John Beames) (London: 1869), vol. II, p. 249.
- 25 Ibid., p. 287.
- 26 Translated by B.H. Baden-Powell, 'Villages of Goa in the Early 16th Century', *JRAS*, 1900, p.268.
- 27 Karl Marx, *Capital*, (translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling; edited by Frederick Engels) (London: 1887 [page-to-page reprint edited by Dona Torr (London, 1938)]), pp. 350–52.
- 28 Cf. Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, pp. 271–3.
- 29 Ibid., pp. 160–63.
- 30 *Ā'in-i Akbarī* (edited by H. Blochmann) (Calcutta: 1866–77), vol. I, p. 300. Cf. Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, pp. 152–3, 166–8.

- 31 Habib, *ibid.*, pp. 152–4. The evidence is analysed with full references to the documentary sources.
- 32 *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, vol. I, p. 285. Todar Mal in his memorandum of 1582 speaks of 'the bastards and head-strong' of the village, 'who do not pay their own share [of the tax], transferring it on to the shoulders of the small peasantry [*reza ri'āyā*]' (original text in Abul Fazl, *Akbarnāma*, MS, British Library (London) Add. 27,247, p. 232b). For Aurangzeb's farman to Rasikdas, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, NS, vol. II, 1906, pp. 233–55.
- 33 The Brindavan evidence on the village community is studied by Irfan Habib in 'Peasant Differentiation and the Structure of Village Community', in Vijay Kumar Thakur and Ashok Aounshuman (ed.), *Peasants in Indian History: 1* (Patna: 1996), pp. 355–71; *ibid.*, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, pp. 144–60.
- 34 Ganesh Hari Khare (ed.), *Persian Sources of Indian History*, (Poona: vol. V, no. 1, 1961), p. 87. The *desāi*, etc., preceding the *patel*, were higher hereditary officials concerned with the assessment and collection of revenue over sub-districts.
- 35 For *varṭana*, Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, p.185 (where *balutas* in the quotation from the Adil Shahi farmān should be corrected to *balūtiyas*). For *baluta*, Hiroshi Fukazawa, *The Medieval Deccan* (Delhi: 1991), pp. 203–4, 209–10. In modern writing both the grain entitlement and the recipient are usually called *balūta*; the term *balūtiya* for the latter does not seem to occur.
- 36 *Selections from the Letters, Despatches and State Papers Preserved in the Bombay Secretariat* (edited by George W. Forrest) (Bombay: 1887), vol. II, p. 181.
- 37 Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India*, pp.156–7, for citations from English reports of the early nineteenth century.
- 38 B.H. Baden-Powell, *Indian Village Community* (London: 1896), pp. 16–17.
- 39 W.H. Wiser, *The Hindu Jajmani System* (Lucknow: 1930).
- 40 This receives Louis Dumont's seal of approval in his *Homo Hierarchicus* (English translation) (London: 1972), p. 150.
- 41 Hiroshi Fukazawa, 'Rural Servants in the Maharashtrian Village: Demiurgic or Jajmani System?' (first published in English in 1972), in his posthumous work, *The Medieval Deccan* (Delhi: 1991), pp. 199–244.

CHAPTER 25

Urbanization in Medieval India

Reeta Grewal

Beginning with the ninth and tenth centuries, a new development in urbanization marked the medieval period of Indian history. There was an overall growth of towns and cities, though not uniform or continuous. Some of the old urban centres went down and many new ones came up. Some regions became more urbanized than the others. The port-towns experienced changes in their fortunes due to factors operative in the sub-continent, in the rest of Asia, and in Europe.

The scope of the subject of urbanization in medieval India is very vast in terms of space and time, and its study is relatively new. The work of the pioneers, W.H. Moreland and K.M. Ashraf, was followed by that of Mohammad Habib. In the past quarter of a century have appeared a number of publications related to urbanization, including several doctoral theses. The urban phenomenon in medieval India can be illustrated with reference to this scholarly literature. The treatment of urbanization under the sultanate of Delhi by K.M. Ashraf and Mohammad Habib, together with a constructive critique of the latter by Irfan Habib, are taken up in the first section. The treatment of urbanization under the Mughals by W.H. Moreland and its elaboration and critique by H.K. Naqvi are taken up in section two. The pre-Turkish situation in the north and the pre-Mughal situation in the south are taken up in the third section. In section four we return to urbanization under the sultanate and the Mughals in the light of the scholarly work of recent decades. The fifth section deals with the processes of urbanization in different regions, and with individual cities and towns. The port cities are taken up in the sixth section. This comprehensive information on various aspects of urbanization in medieval India leaves no doubt about the high degree of urbanization during the period.

I

K.M. Ashraf underlined the role of the rulers in the process of urbanization. Successive dynasties of rulers laid the foundations of new capital cities with royal palaces, markets,

gardens, mosques, roads, and ramparts. Delhi came to be composed of several royal cities. Firoz Tughluq assigned three palaces for giving audience to the nobles, the companions of the sultan, and the common people.² Ashraf talks of town planning and the distinctive features of a typical Hindu city.³ The Muslim rulers made skilful use of Hindu architectural talent in their own buildings and towns, borrowing most of the old features of Hindu cities. To the palaces, tanks, temples, the broad and open spaces, and the height and massiveness of the buildings of the Hindu cities, the Muslims added some distinguishing features of their own: beautiful and spacious mosques, gateways, domes, arches, city walls with watch towers, mausoleums, roofed tanks and baths, and beautiful gardens. The average city of north India came to have both old and new features. Generally situated on the bank of a river or the converging points of trade routes, the city was usually on a higher level than the surrounding country for reasons of defence and security. A high massive wall ran round the city, intercepted by gates that were heavily guarded under the direct supervision of the kotwal. On entering the city enclosure, the principal mosque or temple usually struck the visitor by its unusual height and conspicuous site. The mosque was big enough to accommodate a large gathering of men on Fridays and on other occasions for public prayers. Big reservoirs were laid within or very near the city for the supply of water, especially in case of scarcity of rain or siege. Two main roads running at right-angles intersected the middle of the city and were connected with the main gates of the outer wall. On both sides of the main roads were the four wings of the city bazaar which were occupied by special classes of tradesmen and guilds of craftsmen.³

The royal quarter of the capital city was a magnificent town in itself. In addition to army quarters and parade grounds, elephant and horse stables, it had spacious and beautiful gardens, extensive playgrounds, mosques, baths, colleges, and mausoleums. The royal residence occupied a conspicuous site, on a elevated spot if possible. It was generally built by the side of a river so that the beauty of the building was enhanced by the stream which reflected it by day and threw its shadows by night. Beautiful gardens and other open spaces surrounded the palace. Red stone was used in large quantities. It was rubbed and polished to such fineness that one could see one's reflection on the stone walls of the palace of Delhi in the late thirteenth century. The palace had numerous apartments: a drawing-room, dressing-rooms, bathrooms, retiring rooms, and apartments for women. The walls were decorated with silk hangings and velvet tapestries fringed with brocade and worked with precious stones. Arms and weapons with gold, ebony, and damascened work, candlesticks, candelabras, carpets, ewers, scent boxes, writing cases, chessboards, bookcases, and covers were the usual articles of decoration. The mansions of the nobles of rank and dignitaries of the state were built within the royal quarters.⁴

The *havelis* of the nobility had drawing rooms, baths, sometimes a watertank, a spacious courtyard, and a library. Separate apartments were assigned for the use of the ladies of the *harem*. The drawing-rooms were sometimes decorated with costly hangings and beautiful curtains. The houses of the rich had ornamental woodwork. The Bengal houses were marked by the construction of a tank on one side of the house, an orchard on the other, bamboo groves on the third side, and open spaces on the fourth. The houses in Orissa were spacious and tall, with orchards and plots of land for cultivation. The people of Cambay had many vegetable and fruit gardens and orchards. The houses of the rich in Champanir and Ahmedabad had big courtyards, tanks, and wells, all made of stone.⁵

The city was divided into separate quarters for various social groups. The scavengers, leather-dressers, and beggars were segregated from the rest of the population; they lived on the outskirts of the town. The rest of the population lived in separate quarters, each

belonging to a particular religious, racial, or occupational group. Muslims and Hindus had separate quarters; nobles and common people lived in distinct parts of the city. Among the common people, various trades and castes lived in their own quarters, each designed to be as complete and self-sufficient as possible. Information on the size and population of the cities was not reliable. The population of Gaur, the principal city of Bengal, was estimated at 200,000 persons. Delhi would have a much bigger population than Gaur. The population of cities like Cambay, Multan, Lahore, Agra, Patna, Mathura, Benaras, and Ujjain was considerable but much less than that of Delhi.⁶

Being usually walled, the towns served as centres of refuge to the neighbouring populace in times of danger and insecurity. In times of peace, they served as centres of distribution of agricultural produce and industrial goods. Industries on a large scale were carried on in the cities of Bengal and Gujarat, which were the chief industrial provinces or kingdoms. Only a small proportion of the total population was engaged in trade and industry; a few rich people lived on commerce with foreign nations. Their activities gave rise to urban life in a few big towns, which served as the seat of local or provincial administration. The towns and cities led the country in social and intellectual culture. However, they did not have sufficient economic importance to modify the economic outlook of the people as a whole.⁷

The producers of a commodity in small towns arranged with dealers of those goods in a big city to supply them with finished goods for inland distribution or export. Sometimes the producers themselves sold their stock at the periodical fairs. The large-scale exporters of goods usually lived in coastal towns and arranged directly with the manufacturers, or through their agents, for the purchase and supply of finished goods. Enterprising businessmen engaged a number of craftsmen to manufacture articles under their own supervision. The best organized of such factories were the workshops (*karkhanas*). Sometimes they employed as many as 4,000 weavers of silk alone, besides manufacturers of other kinds of goods for the royalty. The fine muslins, gold-embroidered caps, and silk handkerchiefs of Bengal were highly prized. There was abundance of cotton cloth in Bengal where dhotis and saris, both of silk and cotton, were manufactured in large quantities. The silks of Cambay were among the costly goods brought under control by Alauddin Khalji in Delhi. Their use was confined to the great nobles. Cambay was the centre of manufacture for all kinds of fine and coarse and printed cotton cloth; it also produced cheap varieties of velvet, satins, taffetas, and thick carpets. There were other centres of cotton textiles in Gujarat. The large number of plain and illuminated manuscripts and other documents that have come down to us from the period leave no doubt about the existence of paper industry. Delhi had a regular market of booksellers.⁸

The industrial workers of the cities did not differ greatly from rural craftsmen and shared all their advantages and disadvantages. The industrial guilds were based on caste and were hereditary. Their implements and techniques of work were crude and their output was meagre but excellent. Those who worked outside the royal *karkhanas* did not enjoy any protection or safeguards. The supply of industrial goods was restricted by the needs of a small upper class, which was content with a few varieties of textile goods, a few articles of metal-work or wood-work, specified forms of architecture, and a limited number of other goods. The workmen did not think of the broader needs of a whole community. They had extraordinary skill and produced goods of great artistic value. However, the traditions of guilds and crafts created a rigid exclusiveness; in some cases the secrets of skilled craftsmanship died with them.⁹

Administrative centres like Multan and Lahore, or capital cities like Delhi, served as big clearing houses for whole provinces. At the annual or periodical fairs of a neighbouring

town, the retail merchants and petty shopkeepers of the surrounding places obtained their new stock of goods or replenished the old one. Large-scale business was a preserve of special classes or particular communities. The petty business of a town was similarly in the hands of professional merchants. The most important business communities of Hindustan were the Multanis in the north and the Gujarati banyas on the west coast. The latter spread out into Malabar and Cochin. Foreign Muslim merchants, usually known as Khurasanis, traded all over the country. Big business on the coast and inside the country was usually done with the aid of an organized class of brokers. By the time of Sultan Firoz Tughluq the rules of business and brokerage were important enough to find a place in the legal compendium of the reign. The system of agency was in vogue, and legal agents (*vakils*) were regularly employed by principals to conduct business on their behalf. The city bankers performed some of the functions of present-day banking. They used to give loans and receive deposits (*hundis*). Sometimes indebted nobles transferred to these bankers the right of holding a revenue assignment for a money consideration or a cash payment in advance.¹⁰

Among skilled professions, that of the physician was fairly well established in all big towns and capital cities of Hindustan. Some of them were employed in the royal household. A new discovery in medical treatment, or the introduction of an improved method, brought fame and a fair measure of wealth to the enterprising physician.¹¹

Ashraf takes notice of the ports in connection with the foreign trade of Hindustan. Cambay in Gujarat and Bangala in Bengal were the two important ports in the north for foreign trade. These two ports supplied silk and cotton stuffs to Persia, Turkey, Syria, Ethiopia, and other parts of Asia and Africa. The contact of foreigners contributed to improvement in certain unhealthy social traditions and raised the standard of life in certain localities. In the words of Ashraf: 'The coastal towns of India and inland centres, such as Multan, Lahore, Delhi, and Gaur, which were favourite haunts of foreign merchants, were the most progressive centres of Hindustan in many respects.'¹²

Mohammad Habib, in his 'introduction' to the second volume of Elliot and Dowson's *History of India as Told by its Own Historians*, put forth the hypothesis of 'urban revolution' in northern India during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. With the Ghorian conquest of the north during the thirteenth century, the Turkish slave officers replaced the Thakurs as the governing class, and all discrimination against the city-workers was removed, regardless of their creed. The city labourer helped to establish the new regime, and maintained it for over 500 years. Face to face with the social and economic provisions of the sharia and *smṛiti* as practical alternatives, the Indian city worker preferred the sharia. Everyone, except the topmost Rais and their immediate followers, accepted the new social order. The so-called Ghorian conquest of India was really a revolution of Indian city labour led by the Ghorian Turks. It was not 'a conquest', but a turnover of public opinion.¹³

The government of the Rais had kept the Indian workers outside the city-walls. When the Turks entered the cities the Hindu low-caste workers entered along with them. Their services were needed for government and industrial purposes; without them neither industry nor the government could function properly. No one was excluded from the city now, and all the people lived within the cities without any sort of discrimination. The cities under the new regime were developing into thriving centres of industry and commerce. With their inevitable expansion and overcrowding, the cities came to dominate the countryside more and more. They became sole repositories of the country's civic sense: all revolts were supported by the city workers.¹⁴

Mohammad Habib emphasized that the sharia makes no discrimination in the transactions of civil life and treats free contract as the basis of the economic order, regardless of the creed of the parties. The idea of equality formally embodied in the sharia was relevant for the Indian response to Islam. The Hindu city worker could gain no legal privileges by belonging to the new faith, and the government offered him no temptation. Nevertheless, there was a landslide in favour of the new faith, and large numbers of Muslim workers of purely Indian origin could be found in every city and town by the middle of the thirteenth century. The conversion took place mostly in groups, like elephant drivers, butchers, weavers, sweetmeat makers, and *paan* sellers. The Hindu business community gave no converts to Islam because of its disapproval of usury. The city workers accepted Islam to improve their position in the social order.¹⁵

Fighting was formerly a function of the Thakurs whose profession was hereditary and probably allied to land tenure. Under the new regime the army became a function of the new working class. No one was excluded from the profession on the basis of birth or religion. Unlike the governments of the Rais, the sultanate of Delhi depended not primarily upon its forts, but upon the striking strength of its army as an offensive weapon in the open field. They fashioned an army of Indian soldiers and horsemen drawn from all classes. By the end of the thirteenth century all kinds of trained city artisans could be found in enormous numbers, and their ranks were swelled by an even larger number of unskilled workers.¹⁶

According to Mohammad Habib, the great changes that came over the country were reflected in the rapid growth of the city of Delhi. The centrepiece of the Turkish official hierarchy was the sultan in his palace with its enormous organization. Every soldier of the sultanate was expected to come to Delhi once a year for review. A great market grew up to supply the requirements of the great cantonment with its constantly changing personnel from all provinces. In the capital were established the manufactories (*karkhanas*) required by the palace or the army. The Turkish governing class spent in the capital the revenues collected in the provinces, and gathered its enormous retinue of fighting men, artisans of all grades, large contingents of personal servants, dancing girls and their circle of musicians and buffoons, poets and literati, students living on charity, mullahs, and mystics.¹⁷

The city had a large number of inns, some of them being charity concerns, for all kinds of merchants and travellers. Hindu Naiks used 10,000 to 20,000 oxen to supply provisions to the city. There were general markets for things of common use and specialized markets for grain, cloth, horses, and slaves of all nationalities. The markets were crowded with brokers who helped the people to buy and sell. Industries grew up along with commerce. Not only the manufacture of armaments, but also the training of dancing girls and prostitutes made Delhi a special kind of city. It was also the centre of banking. All sorts of people wanted loans, including the Turkish officers, some of whom were always in the debt of Hindu moneylenders (*sahukars*).¹⁸

What distinguished Delhi above all things was its cultural set-up. Some colleges were organized by the government and a few owed their origin to rich donors. A large number of teachers plied their own trade. Muslim students came from the provinces for higher studies and squeezed themselves into mosques, inns, mausoleums, and private houses. They were generally considered to be the most deserving recipients of charity. Hindu astrologers were in great demand; their advice and direction was sought by Muslims as well as Hindus. There was at least one astrologer of distinction in every *muhalla* of the city. The seamy side of the capital was represented by taverns and brothels. Courtesans of the higher classes were well trained in dance and music and in the refinements of culture. They were

brought up with expensive care, taught riding, polo, and wielding the lance 'with thousands of accomplishments and graces'. The taverns and brothels were centres of crime and vice. They were noisy affairs and kept the neighbourhood disturbed. Habitual criminals, false witnesses, and other undesirable characters could be picked up in the taverns which were plentiful in Delhi.¹⁹

The houses of the great officers were three- or four-storey buildings with a small, winding staircase on one side. Presumably, they had good gardens. The houses of the rich merchants were of the same style, but in the heart of the crowded city; the lower storey was used for sales and business transactions and the upper storeys for the residence of the family. The mass of the people lived in mud houses with thatched roofs. By the end of the thirteenth century Delhi had come to occupy a unique position in the world. The claim that Delhi was the heir to the great cities of Iraq and Ajam was a recurrent theme in contemporary literature. The citizens of Delhi always referred to it as *Hazrat-i Delhi*, or 'The City' (*shahr*).²⁰

Unhappy with the formulation but not with the substance of Mohammad Habib's hypothesis of urban revolution in north India during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Irfan Habib underlines that the sultanate saw a considerable expansion of the urban economy. Three interrelated developments appear to have occurred: there was a considerable growth in the size and possibly number of the towns; there was a marked expansion in craft production; and there was a corresponding expansion in commerce. The increase in craft production was signified by a number of changes or improvements in technology, especially in the textiles, paper, and building industries. Silver and gold were minted for growth in commercial transactions. The new land revenue system enabled the ruling class of the sultanate to appropriate a large part of the country's surplus. In essence, it meant the entire or partial replacement of superior classes of the countryside by an urban ruling class. Owing to the centralization of the entire political structure, the nobles of the sultanate could not disperse themselves into the country; they spent most of their income in towns. The urban setting suited their cultural tradition. In broad terms, thus, Mohammad Habib's hypothesis of the advance in urbanization is substantiated by actual evidence. The growth of towns and commerce and a large volume of urban production was a characteristic feature of the new regime. However, these changes did not arise out of the 'liberation' of any section of society. On the contrary, slave labour acquired crucial importance in the urban economy. It was undoubtedly a major channel for the gradual growth of an urban Muslim artisan class, standing outside the framework of the caste system and contributing an important element of competition and mobility in the organization of craft production. There is no evidence that the state or the Muslims assaulted the caste system.²¹ Irfan Habib remarks elsewhere that the Turkish regime was very much different from the 'feudalism' of the earlier centuries, which was marked by the decay of commerce, decline of towns, and a structure of power marked by an hierarchical order and dispersal at each level.²²

II

W.H. Moreland's comments embrace the size and distribution of urban centres, city administration and its effects on trade and production, urban industries and their organization, sea ports, trade routes, and organization of trade, the various classes of people living in towns and cities, and their styles in living at the death of Akbar. Noticing change in the fortunes of 'towns and cities', Moreland observed that some of the ancient capital

cities, like Kanauj and Vijayanagar, were in a state of decay. Others like Jaunpur still retained some portion of their earlier importance. The imperial capital of Agra, the Deccan capitals of Golkonda and Bijapur, and the provincial capitals like Delhi, Lahore, Multan, Allahabad, Patna, Ujjain, Ahmedabad, and Ajmer were large and populous cities. A common feature of the Mughal Indian cities were extensive gardens that lay outside the city wall. About the general character of cities, Moreland quotes Father Monserrate:

The cities look attractive from a distance, but inside them all the splendour is lost in the narrowness of the streets and the bustling of the crowds. The houses have no windows. Rich men have gardens, ponds and fountains within their walls, but externally there is nothing to delight the eye. The common people live in huts and hovels, and to have seen one city is to have seen all'.²³

The Mughal empire had an 'abundance of towns'. Agra was said to be one of the biggest cities of the world; it was greater than London. Lahore was larger than Constantinople; it was second to none in Asia or Europe. Vijayanagar was as large as Rome. Delhi was not much less than Paris. Moreland argues that since Paris had less than 400,000 inhabitants at this time and no other European city had more than 200,000, the greatest Indian cities probably had 250,000 to 500,000 people. The population of the capital swelled when the emperor's court was there, and it dwindled in his absence. Probably no city of India had 'a resident population' of 500,000, though in temporary aggregations of people the number could exceed half a million.²⁴

The principal cities of the Mughal empire were in charge of separate officers. Whereas the qazi and the *mir-i'adl* appeared to deal mainly with questions arising out of Muslim law, the civil and criminal cases were commonly taken up by the kotwal, the city governor. The duties of the kotwal in the *Ain-i Akbari* indicate that he was intended to be very much more than the head of the city police. It was his duty to prevent and detect crime, but he had also the power to punish offenders, to perform many of the municipal functions, to regulate prices, to set the idle to work, and generally to interfere in almost every detail of the daily life of the city. The kotwal was a very powerful autocrat, open to bribery and influence. He could make use of espionage and torture for eliciting information, and award drastic punishments. A prudent man of affairs cultivated friendly terms with the kotwal and his numerous subordinates to live in peace and security.²⁵

Moreland appears to assume that most of the non-agrarian production went on in towns and cities. He is explicit on the point that industries were localized in a comparatively small number of towns and cities. The activities associated with Allahabad or Lahore, for instance, could not be associated with all cities. Possibly, a certain amount of grain was milled at Surat and other ports connected with the provisioning of ships, and at inland towns to meet the need of travellers and visitors. 'Powder sugar' was produced in Ahmedabad and the more costly candy was produced in Lahore and some other towns. Without reference to particular places, Moreland talks of the craftsmen like jewellers, silversmiths, workers in ivory, coral, amber, and tortoiseshell, perfumers, and druggists catering to an exceedingly narrow market. Metalwork, woodwork, and paper manufacture are also mentioned without reference to any specific places, and as having a limited market. Boats are mentioned in connection with Agra, Allahabad, Lahore, and Multan, besides the production of boats and ships on the sea coast.²⁶

The most important industry in Mughal India was textiles. Silk was produced and consumed in Bengal and was imported from China. The silk-weaving industry was localized in Cambay, Ahmedabad, and Pattan, and weaving was carried on in Chaul. Production in Kashmir was worked up locally, and carried to Lahore and Agra, and probably some

other cities. Silk was eventually a luxury product. Woollen goods used by the upper classes were largely imported. Shawls from hair were woven in Kashmir. Under Akbar's patronage the industry was established at Lahore and Agra where some good specimens were produced. Cotton cloth was more generally used, and a large number of towns and cities were known for cotton industry. There was a general market for superior qualities of cloth. Cities like Lahore, Multan, Burhanpur, and Golkonda were well known for their goods. Production for export was drawn from four tracts: the Indus plain, the country along the Gulf of Cambay upto Dabul, the Coromandel coast, and Bengal. Among the towns and cities well known for export were Lahore, Multan, Sukkur, Thatta, Ahmedabad, Patan, Baroda, Broach, Cambay, Surat, and Agra. There were many smaller places too, which produced cotton goods for export.²⁷

On industrial organization, Moreland observed that production was carried on by artisans without superior capitalist direction. The prevalence of the artisan system of production did not imply, however, that great enterprises could not be undertaken. The system of working a large number of small units was in operation at the diamond fields in the seventeenth century. Imperial workshops were maintained at the Mughal capital, in which the artisans worked under direction. It is possible that private workshops of a similar type were in existence in the case of some handicrafts. But this was not the case with the weaving industry in which artisans worked independently, and generally on a bare subsistence.²⁸

An exclusively urban phenomenon was the labour market. Men could be seen standing in the market place to be hired. Abul Fazl mentions rates of daily wages applied primarily to expenditure in the Imperial camp. It may be presumed, however, that these rates indicate more or less the general position in the north. There were four categories of workers: ordinary labourer, superior labourer, carpenter, and builder. The range of their wages was two to seven *dams* a day. The rates of wages struck the European visitors to India as very low.²⁹

Moreland takes notice of the seaports for external and internal trade. Starting from the north-west of India, he talks of the disappearance of Dewal and its replacement by Lahari Bandar which had direct communication with Thatta, Multan, and Lahore. In the Gulf of Cambay the largest port was Cambay itself, followed by Surat and Broach. The Gulf ports, particularly Surat, were the starting-points of pilgrims to the holy places of Arabia. Below Surat was the port of Dabul, and next to it was Bhalkal, which had served Vijayanagar well, but was now in decline. On the Malabar coast, between Mangalore and the Cape, Calicut was the most important Indian port. On the east coast were Nagapatam and Masulipatam. In Bengal there were three principal ports: Satgaon-Hooghly, Sripur, and Chittagong. The chief outlets for the produce of the country in the descending order of importance were the Cambay ports, Bengal, the Coromandel coast, and the Indus. The Malabar ports had the valuable speciality of pepper. Besides these, there were 'foreign ports' in the Indian seas, generally of the Portuguese, of which Goa and Cochin were the most important.³⁰

The hinterlands of ports extended sometimes to faraway cities like Agra and Lahore. The large cities of the north were linked with foreign markets through land routes too. There were two regular routes: from Lahore to Kabul, and from Multan to Qandahar. Both these routes carried a considerable volume of traffic. Moreland assumes that Lahore and Multan had trade links with the other cities of the north. Indeed, 12,000 to 14,000 camels, carrying a total load of 5,000 tonnes, passed through Lahore every year. The traffic by land was confined, however, to goods of high value in proportion to their bulk. Besides the changing seasons and the degree of security in different parts of the country, inland trade

was governed by differences in the level of prices. The traffic down the Ganges consisted of salt from Rajputana; the most important commodities on the Indus were textiles and indigo.³¹

The large volume of trade was carried on by a comparatively small number of castes or races spread all over the country. The most prominent communities of traders were the Muslims of the seaboard, the banyas of Gujarat, and the Chettis of the Coromandel coast. They were reinforced by Persians, Armenians, and Jews. Inland as well as coastal trade was distinctly of a cosmopolitan character. The distribution over a large area of the members of a few communities was favourable to the development of business organization, particularly for exchange. The system of exchange was not confined to Indian cities. Bills in Agra, for instance, could be obtained on Ispahan. A merchant requiring money to buy goods for Surat could obtain it on giving a two-month bill on that town at any place as far up the country as Agra, where it would be exchanged for a bill on Surat. The charges were rather high, but varied from place to place: 1 to 1.5 per cent at Ahmedabad, 6 per cent at Benaras, and 10 per cent at Dhaka. The charges were inclusive of the current rates of interest and the risks of transport. The money-changers of India were regarded as professionally superior to their counterparts in the world. Money-changing was an urban activity *par excellence*.³²

The capital cities, with their royal establishments, and the establishments of the nobility received more attention from Moreland, followed by the provincial capitals. His observations on the urban population, thus, were confined to the large cities. Descriptions of Vijayanagar, the capital cities of the Deccan, and of Agra suggest that the king and his courtiers, with their enormous incomes and huge establishments, formed the major consumers of goods. The provincial capitals had the establishments of the governors and other members of the ruling class. The higher ranks, though few in number, controlled the expenditure of a large proportion of the income, and the lower ranks were sufficiently numerous to make up in the aggregate a substantial proportion of the urban population. Moreland regards them all as parasites from the economic point of view; they fed upon the fruits of the workers' toil and contributed nothing to the common stock except an imperfect and precarious measure of security. There were some other classes too in this category. They were all directly or indirectly connected with the state or its functionaries.³³

The educated middle class was very small. The physician, the artist, or the literary man could hope to obtain an adequate income only by attaching himself to the imperial court or one of the provincial governors who organized their surroundings on the model of the court. Patronage was the only alternative to the narrowness of the market for their skills or products. Official rank could be conferred on physicians, artists, poets, and scholars, and individuals could be rewarded for a particular achievement. The chief characteristic of a professional career was insecurity. In Golkonda and Bijapur there were scarcely any doctors except for kings and princes. A large town might contain one or two men with some practice in medicine; the common people doctored themselves with herbs they gathered. The prospects of artists and professional men were more favourable in the north. The influence of the state largely dominated the professions.³⁴

Another class of people patronized by the state were connected with religious institutions. The majority of them lived in towns and cities. The influence of the court was comparatively unimportant in their case. A considerable portion of the state revenue was alienated for the support of religious institutions. In the time of Akbar this patronage was extended to non-Muslims. A few of them lived in cities. Another category of people to be substantially represented in towns and cities were servants and slaves. The number of such

persons attached to royal establishments and the establishments of the nobles was very large. However, servants and slaves were employed also in the homes of people belonging to the middling classes. Slaves were employed for many domestic purposes in towns and cities. They were obtained from various sources. The treatment meted out to them was similar to the treatment of domestic servants.³⁵

The upper classes in cities and towns lived in comfort. The members of the aristocracy had a substantial surplus for investment or for expenditure on luxuries, after meeting the needs of their establishments and their own. The courtiers and officials tried to follow the example of magnificence set by kings and emperors. Apart from food, clothes, jewellery, and house accommodation, they required a very large staff of servants. The contemporary travellers refer to their life of luxury—'a surfeit of every kind of pleasure', 'voluptuousness and wealth confusedly intermingled'—and the consequent impoverishment of the nobles, most of whom lived beyond their means in the capital cities and in the provincial capitals.³⁶

The professional men of the middle classes were not exactly prosperous. The position of the merchants varied greatly; there were many rich men among them, but the average trader did not have large income. According to a contemporary traveller there were many rich merchants or tradesmen in cities and towns, but they tried to conceal their wealth. Though actually rich, they wore the garb of indigence. Most of them were thrifty and even parsimonious. An exception to this rule were the Muslim merchants of the west coast. The Muslims settled in Calicut, for example, were well dressed, had large houses and many servants, and lived luxuriously. By contrast, the merchants of the interior led a quiet and unostentatious life. The artisans and labourers lived more or less on the level of subsistence.³⁷

Moreland sums up the position of the various classes of people in the cities and towns of India at the opening of the seventeenth century. The upper classes were small in numbers, but they enjoyed incomes far larger than their reasonable needs, and spent these incomes lavishly on objects of luxury and display. The merchants on the coast adopted a somewhat similar style of living, but elsewhere the men of business did not indulge in open expenditure; like the rest of the middle classes they lived inconspicuous and probably frugal lives. The mass of the people, including craftsmen and labourers, slaves and domestic servants, enjoyed practically nothing by way of communal services or advantages.³⁸

For the seventeenth century, Moreland talks of Indian markets, changes in production and consumption, results of famine, influence of the administration, and the system of taxation, with only a few references to towns and cities. Furthermore, he talks of the development of Dutch and English commerce in India, changes in its foreign commerce, and the establishment of new markets in western Europe. He gives more information on Indian merchants and talks of markets in a few cities and ports. He talks of craftsmen and urban workers, reinforcing what he had stated in his earlier work. The artisans could never become rich because if money was gained, it did not go into their pockets; it served only to increase the wealth of the merchants. Next to the rainfall, the working of the administration was the most important factor in the economic life of the country. It was better to be a peon than a peasant. Production was dominated by the administration. The payments required from artisans and petty traders had settled down on a more or less customary basis. The levy of duty on goods brought into a city for consumption was a recognized institution. Thus, on the whole, Moreland does not provide the same kind of information on urban centres and urban life for the seventeenth century as he does for the reign of Akbar.

Moreland comes to the conclusion that the unproductive population was found mainly in towns or camps, while production was carried on chiefly in the villages. In other words,

the economic system operated to provide the urban population with subsistence below cost. This was particularly true of food. The harvest gluts reduced the price of agricultural produce temporarily because of the need of the cultivator to pay the revenue. This condition secured to the urban population supplies of food and other produce at less cost than if the markets had been free. The working of the revenue system was an important factor in transferring a large proportion of the profits earned in villages to the towns. 'Weavers, naked themselves, toiled to clothe others. Peasants, themselves hungry, toiled to feed the towns and cities.'³⁹

H.K. Naqvi's *Urban Centres and Industries in Upper India 1556-1803* is divided into two parts: urban centres and urban industries. In the first part, five cities are taken up for detailed treatment: Lahore, Delhi, Agra, Benaras, and Patna. The first three are regarded as capital cities and the last two as commercial towns. Apart from a broad outline of the history of the capital cities, special attention is given to their location, hinterland, water supply, provisioning, commerce, industries, population, and town planning. These three metropolitan cities reflected the highest level of the economic, educational, cultural, and social developments of three centuries, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth. Founded originally for political considerations, they developed identities, population, character, and resources of their own. According to Naqvi, the Mughal monarchs allowed the capital cities 'to grow their own individualities on independent lines'.⁴⁰

The commercial towns of Patna and Benaras were next in rank to the capital cities. Their location on the Ganges in the Middle Gangetic Plain, their hinterlands, provisioning, commerce, industries, and population are discussed in some detail, especially commerce.⁴¹ On each of the five cities there is more information in Naqvi's work than in the earlier publications. Apart from the demographic composition, some of the morphological and architectural features of the cities are noticed. The concern is no longer confined to features connected with administration, trade, and industries. There is thus a new kind of approach to the urban centres and a new kind of treatment in terms of specificities.

The discussion of industries is not confined to the five cities treated in the first part. Rather like Moreland, Naqvi discusses the industries in north India in general, with or without reference to specific towns. The largest space is given to the most important industry, that is, textiles. The allied industry of dyeing is also discussed in some detail. The manufacture of carpets is treated briefly, like some other cotton goods. The dress of men and women is also described. The organization of trade by sea and land, and the political changes affecting trade are also brought in.⁴² Some other industries discussed relate to iron, copper, salt, sugar, and paper on the lines of Moreland and Ashraf. The study of industries does not integrate with the study of the five cities in the earlier part of the work.

Naqvi concludes that the pre-Mughal period provided the requisite background for a spurt of urban centres during the Mughal period. Town after town had begun to appear since the thirteenth century, and cities like Delhi, Benaras, Lahore, Hisar Firoza, Jaunpur, Agra, and Allahabad were already in existence. The foundation and expansion of towns continued till about the very end of the period. Agrarian surplus and the migration of people from rural to urban areas was necessary for the growth of towns. The craftsmen in particular travelled to the urban areas where greater facilities were available in terms of raw materials and local market for the production of all types of manufactured goods. With the passage of time specialization in crafts got more and more marked. The view (put forth by Moreland) that the cities extorted revenues from the villages and gave nothing in return was 'by no means a correct assessment of the situation'. The urban markets encouraged the rural producer to increase his own output.⁴³

According to Naqvi, there were four types of towns in Mughal Hindustan: primarily administrative centres, primarily commercial towns, centres of pilgrimage, and towns with particular industries. It is interesting to note that the examples for the first three types come from the five cities discussed by Naqvi, but the examples of the fourth type are Samana, Khairabad, and Daryabad. None of these was a large city. The state seldom took direct measures for the development of non-metropolitan towns.⁴⁴ The absence of Aurangzeb from Hindustan from 1683 to 1707 did not result in any depression in the general activities of the towns. However, the 'anarchy' in Hindustan during the half-century after Aurangzeb's death resulted in the decline of towns. Awadh was an exceptionally rich and well-governed principality in the late eighteenth century, and people flocked to its towns from the troublesome western parts. In the reign of Asafuddaulah (1775–99), however, the reputation of Awadh was sinking. On the whole, the decline of towns and cities was due to political disorders and not due to any internal development in the urban centres. Agra, no longer the capital of the Mughal empire after 1638, continued to flourish till about the last two decades of the eighteenth century. Benaras retained its prosperity, and even after 1764 its industries flourished, especially that of silk, and its commerce in sugar and opium grew more lively. The Mughal emperors were deliberately considerate of artisans and merchants. Even during the worst period, the urban population of Lahore and Delhi did not join hands with the rebels. 'The Great Mughals had founded a far more solid base for themselves amongst the dependent artisans and merchants than among the powerful dignitaries of the state.'⁴⁵

H.K. Naqvi's *Urbanization and Urban Centres Under the Great Mughals 1556–1707* complements her earlier book by covering the chief trading centres of the Mughal empire, excluding the region of Hindustan covered in the earlier work. Among these chief trading centres are Kabul, Lahori Bandar, Thatta, Ahmedabad, Cambay, Surat, Burhanpur, Gaur, Tanda, Satgaon, and Hooghly. Moreland had said something on each of these cities, but Naqvi provides much more information. However, this information is not illumined by any general remarks.⁴⁶ The most relevant chapter for our purpose relates to urbanization in India under the Muslim rulers. Naqvi observes the Turko-Pathans and the Great Mughals 'were able to mould the economic policies at will'.⁴⁷ She refutes the idea that the towns were parasitical. In her view, towns and villages were interdependent, working in mutual coordination, so that the prosperity or stagnation of one immediately produced corresponding response in the other.⁴⁸ 'The artisans served as the productive base of urban economic life; his products constituted one of the chief sources through which the towns could eventually acquire an independent economic status'.⁴⁹ Thus, Naqvi is repeating her earlier ideas. The large-scale conversion of Indian artisans to Islam is taken to indicate some assurance of advancement in their social status and safeguards regarding their professional interests.⁵⁰

All towns did not grow uniformly; the rate of their development depended upon several factors like topography, the hinterland, the interest of the state, and the level of urban growth in the surrounding region. Clearly, not all regions in the imperial territory were equally advanced in terms of urban growth. The most urbanized areas were the region between Lahore and Benaras, and the Ahmedabad–Burhanpur–Surat sector. The desert or semi-desert tracts were too arid and Bengal was much too wet to experience large-scale urbanization. Similarly, Kashmir and Kabul did not present great promise.⁵¹

The towns were known for their cultural life. An academic atmosphere was introduced in the towns by primary schools (*maktabs*) and seminaries for higher learning (*madrassas*). Learning among the Hindus was confined to the Brahmans, but education

among Muslims was available to all. The mosques and mausoleums had maktabas and madrassas attached to them. Their number increased with the growth of the town. Educational institutions were maintained by the state or by private donations. Many of the institutions received madad-i ma'ash grants. Secular disciplines like ethics, accounting, agriculture, mensuration, engineering, politics, literature, astronomy, medicine, higher mathematics, history, and the physical and mechanical sciences were also taught. These institutions enabled the town to acquire a distinct intellectual identity of its own. Though all towns embodied all the different aspects of urban life—administrative, industrial, commercial, and religious-cum-intellectual—they tended to develop one or more aspects as predominant.⁵²

On the whole, Naqvi finds a remarkable consistency in urban growth under 'Muslim rulers'. The Turko-Afghan rulers introduced a large measure of urbanization, which reached its highest watermark under the Great Mughals. The decline of the Mughal empire was accompanied by a sure degree of de-urbanization, which was at its lowest under the successor states during the late eighteenth century.⁵³

III

Hiuen Tsang refers to a number of decayed urban centres in the Punjab, and much more so in the Ganga basin, in the first half of the seventh century. In many regions villages too lay in waste. But Hiuen Tsang bears testimony to the existence not only of towns but also of cities like Kanyakubja and Varanasi. Urban characteristics, like commerce, were present also in the Indo-Gangetic divide, the Ganga valley, and the Himalayan foothills. Archaeological evidence reveals the survival of old urban centres and the emergence of new ones in these areas. Instances of rulers establishing new townships abound in literature and in epigraphs, covering such widely distant regions as Kashmir, Rajasthan, and Bengal. A good amount of literature on towns and town planning relates to the early medieval period. Though highly stereotyped, this literature does seem to have a bearing on the contemporary situation.⁵⁴

In this broad context, B.D. Chattopadhyaya has analysed documentary evidence from the Indo-Gangetic divide, the Upper Ganga basin, and the Malwa plateau. In the late ninth century, Prthudaka (Pehoa) in Haryana was the site of an important market place where dealers in horses were organized into a guild. They hailed from nine different localities and gave donations not only to a religious shrine at Prthudaka itself, but also to shrines at places which were widely distant from Prthudaka. In the late ninth and early tenth century Tattanandapura (Ahar) near Bulandshahr was a fully developed township. Its urban character emerges from a number of indications in the record, which finds confirmation from archaeology. All the characteristics of Ahar were present at Siyadoni in Jhansi district during the ninth century. In the same geographical region, Gopagiri (Gwalior) had an urban complex in the ninth century. Thus, in widely distant areas under the Gurjara Pratihara there are sure signs of urbanization. Furthermore, before emerging as fully developed urban centres, all these sites were central points in local commerce, indicating a developmental process. This process did not preclude long-distance contacts. Within the urban centres there was marked differentiation in terms of morphology and demography. The guilds of traders possibly cut across the frontiers of caste and region. On the whole, thus, the evidence on these urban centres suggests continuity of inland trade and urbanization.⁵⁵

That the phenomenon of urbanization in the early medieval period was widely distributed geographically is evident from the information on different parts of the country. The number of towns in the Malwa area under the Parmaras has been estimated at twenty, in Gujarat under the Chalukyas at eight, in Andhra between 1000 and 1336 at more than seventy, in Rajasthan under the Chahamanas at 131, and in Karnataka in the eleventh century at seventy-eight. It is clear that the emergence of centres that could be considered distinct from rural settlements was phenomenal in the early medieval period, suggesting proliferation of urban centres of relatively modest dimensions. The majority of the early medieval centres corresponded to different tiers of regional power.⁵⁶

The history of south India from the ninth to the twelfth century was marked by the expansion of rural settlements and the growth of urban centres. Apart from the capital cities of the Cholas as huge urban complexes during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a large number of small towns (*taniyurs*) also emerged in different regions of the Chola dominions. Kanchipuram, a sacred centre with a large number of Shaiva and Vaishnava temples, developed into a premier weaving centre in south India. It became a secondary political centre under the Cholas without losing its commercial character. When it lost its importance as a political centre at the end of the Chola period, its sacred character enabled it to retain its vitality as a commercial centre. Mamallapuram, which was superseded by Nagapatnam as the chief port of the Cholas, continued to be a part of the huge commercial network till about the thirteenth century. Many of the *nagarams*, which were no more than a common market for the nadu villages, developed into urban centres of considerable size. The revival of long-distance trade in the tenth century was a factor of considerable importance in urban growth. It resulted in the emergence of new coastal towns to serve new hinterlands.⁵⁷

Champakalakshmi looks upon early medieval south India as a distinct phase in the history of urbanization in the south. Urbanism of the early historical phase in the south was the result mainly of external trade, and most urban centres were actually trade enclaves. The early medieval urbanization, from the seventh to the thirteenth century, was the result of a new socio-economic formation during the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries. The brahmadeya and the temple served as the basis of agricultural expansion and the source of surplus for the growth of urban centres. Besides the availability of a surplus, trade and commodity production began to promote the growth of towns. The market or commercial centres, called nagarams, began to increase with the pressing need of market facilities from the early Chola period. The emergence of market centres for all the agrarian regions, and the commercial network linking the four major sub-regions (mandalams), synchronized with the rise of the Cholas. The proliferation of the nagaram kept pace with the expansion of the Chola dominions into Andhra and the southern Karnataka. In the middle Chola period, trading activities within the nagarams diversified due to specialization in marketing and trade.⁵⁸

Equally important was the organization of commerce by corporate trading communities, commonly referred to as guilds. One of the most important of these, known as the Five Hundred, originated in Aihole in the Bijapur district of Karnataka in the eighth century. It was the largest organization of itinerant merchants of a supra-regional character. It was easily distinguishable from the organization known as the *Manigramam* in the Tamil country, which was a merchant organization operating within specific regions. Another body of merchants, known as the *Anjuvannan*, was an organization of foreign merchants who began their commercial activities on the west coast of Kerala in the eighth and ninth centuries. All these organizations interacted with one another. The policy of the rulers was to encourage

these organizations. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries there was a phenomenal increase in guild activities, with a tendency of the Five Hundred to expand its sphere of influence and to rely less on royal support and patronage. Another sphere in which the merchant organization assumed a dominant role related to craft groups for which there is more direct evidence in the guild inscriptions of Karnataka and Andhra than in Tamil Nadu. The presence of craft groups with the Five Hundred provided a certain degree of legitimacy to corporate trade in various articles.⁵⁹

Even when trade and commercial activities were the major factors in urbanization, the presence of religious institutions was a necessary concomitant of the urban process. Shaivism became a more efficacious instrument of acculturation for acquiring a wider popular base through the ideology of bhakti. The Chola rulers encouraged this tendency through patronage. The worship of the linga, as the royal cult of the Cholas, was of central importance in this acculturation. The royal patronage is reflected in the stupendous projects of erecting temples in Thanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram. The focus of political and economic power had clearly shifted from the brahmadeya to the temple from the ninth century. The subtle interplay of the social, economic, and religious institutions, and their political role, was exemplified in Thanjavur. The city consisted of an internal circuit around the temple, meant for the residences of the priestly, administrative, and other elite groups, and an outer circuit meant for other professional and service groups, including the nagaram organizations. Thus, the rich and the powerful lived at the centre, while the poor lived at the margins. The markets were neither central nor dominant, but a product of the demands from the nucleation by 'the ceremonial centre'. The economic outreach of the temple covered the whole kingdom; villages from all the mandalams were assigned for its upkeep. The peasantry, artisans, and shepherds in the immediate vicinity of the city supplied the ritual requirements. Special endowments were made by the rulers for the performance of plays and celebrations of days connected with events within the royal family. The temple was a veritable treasure house of arts: frescoes representing themes from the stories of the bhakti saints, their bronze images together with those of various deities, and sculptures of rich iconographic content.⁶⁰

Champakalakshmi looks upon the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in the history of urbanization in south India as a watershed. New features of the urban landscape and their connection with the changing pattern of power relationships that evolved with the rise of Vijayanagar indicate a disjunctive process in the urbanization of south India, beginning with a general trend towards militarization and fragmentation of political power. Already in the thirteenth century, the increasing importance and power of the merchant bodies was reflected in the militarily protected towns called *viradalam* and *suradalam*. During the Vijayanagar period the mercantile community seems to have entered into new forms of contractual relationships, especially with the new loci of power, eventually coming to terms with the shift in the major centre of power to the Tungbhadra region in Karnataka under the Vijayanagar rulers. Militarization of the state also brought into existence a new set of fortified urban centres of the subordinate chiefs (*nayaka*). The old ideological apparatuses became incapable of preventing the gradual secularization of political power, though the ceremonial centre retained the traditional symbols of validation. The royal centre was separated from the sacred complex, separating the ceremonial and military aspects of the new urban forms from the religious complex in which the sacred aspects of the earlier ideological tradition dominated. The cultural, religious, and politico-military elites now stood opposed to the lower groups in the urban centres as well as the countryside.⁶¹

In Karnataka the number of towns in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries was close to a dozen, but in the tenth century it was close to a score. It rose to thirty in the eleventh century and to forty-six in the twelfth. In the first three centuries the towns were either religious centres or administrative headquarters. Only the ports of Goa and Chaul showed some commercial activity, and Mangalore was probably a flourishing port town. In the eleventh century commercial activity became more pronounced in over half a dozen towns. In the twelfth century the number of market towns, port towns and mint towns was seventeen. Significantly, several terms indicating the existence of urban centres began to appear in the inscriptions of the tenth century, and became more frequent from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. The urban centres were not evenly spread all over Karnataka. There was a greater concentration of towns in the western and north-western sub-region, which covered the districts of Bijapur, Belgaon, Dharwar, North Canara, South Canara, and Shimoga. These six districts had nearly two-thirds of the towns, whereas the thirteen districts of the eastern sub-region, and the south and south-eastern sub-region had a little less than one-third. Obviously the west and north-western sub-regions experienced a much higher degree of urbanization than the rest of Karnataka. The largest concentration of commercial towns was also in this sub-region: sixteen towns out of a total of thirty-eight were flourishing market towns, port towns, and mint towns. The western and north-western districts produced silk and cotton cloth for export. There is enough evidence to suggest that commercial activity played a crucial role in the process of urbanization, in addition to the existing administrative and religious factors.⁶²

There is some evidence on the morphological features of towns and cities in Karnataka, which suggests that some of the capital towns were well planned. The cities were divided into a number of quarters in which people belonging to different trades and professions lived separately. Apart from religious institutions, there were schools for boys and girls, and dispensaries in some of the cities. Tanks and wells were needed for the supply of water, and gardens were laid out where water was available for irrigation. The main streets in a town were named; some of the streets were known for specialized craftsmen like weavers, or tradesmen like perfumers. There is clear evidence that the houses of the rich people had provision for a dining space, a separate study room, and a guest room. The important buildings, both public and private, were whitewashed. The house of a rich merchant consisted of several storeys, upto seven in a few cases. For building activity there was a considerable number of architects, masons, carpenters, plasterers, whitewashers, and other skilled and unskilled labourers.⁶³

There is information on the administration of towns and cities. The terms used in this connection are *pattanasvami*, *pattanasetti*, *gavunda*, *nagarapati*, *purapati*, and *sthanapati*. The *pattanasvami* controlled the administration of the commercial centres of port towns. Known also as the *pattanasetti*, he was head of trade guild of the town and managed its public works. For this purpose he collected a cess from the members of the guild. Some *pattanasvamis* took interest in the construction of temples, tanks, resthouses, and other works of public utility. For their contribution to the development of the towns they received concessions from the state. There could be several *gavundas* and *settis* in a town, suggesting that their responsibility was confined to smaller units of the town. The terms *nagarapati*, *purapati*, and *sthanapati* appear to have been used synonymously for the town administrator appointed by the ruler. The cities had ward counsels that were consulted by the town administrator and could discharge some responsibilities in connection with their wards. A number of merchant guilds started operating in different towns from the tenth century. The income of towns and cities came from tolls, taxes, and professional duties

levied on various accounts. The town assembly was known as *nagara-mahajana*. In one case the assembly had 120 members. The leader of this assembly was the chief of the town (*urodeya*). Another city had three mahajans. One of these looked after the general administration, another functioned as a ward counsel, and the third controlled the affairs of the mercantile community of the city. Some of the merchant guilds functioned as banking corporations. They appeared to have become increasingly important during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.⁶⁴

IV

The process of urbanization that started afresh in the early medieval period was considerably accelerated in the north by the establishment of the sultanate of Delhi in the thirteenth century as a large and relatively centralized state. Its capital became a large city, and a number of other towns and cities came up as the centres of administration at lower levels. Some of the older towns declined and others developed further under the new regime. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries several new towns were founded. The growth of towns stood in dialectical relationship to trade, improved means of communication, and a sound currency system based on the silver *tanka* and the copper *dirham*. Domestic trade linked local markets with district towns, and the district towns with cities in different regions. Trade with Central and West Asia was revived after many centuries on a considerable scale through Lahore and Multan.⁶⁵

The economic life of the town was dominated by the nobles and their retainers, traders, and shopkeepers. However, the largest section in the cities consisted of servants and slaves, artisans, soldiers, peddlers, musicians, performers, and beggars. The entry to the city was regulated by the kotwal who was responsible for the law and order, regulating the markets, and controlling gambling and prostitution. People following a particular profession lived in separate muhallas which could be locked at night for safety. There were separate quarters for the king and the nobles in the capital city. Scavengers, leather-workers, and beggars lived within the town wall, but at the outskirts of the town. The capital and large towns or cities were centres of craft production. Some of the towns began to specialize in particular craft.⁶⁶

The big cities had a considerable number of rich traders and financiers, known as Sahs, Modis, and Sarrafs. Their trading activities were geared to the movement of bulk commodities within the country and to the demand for luxury goods required by the nobility. Long-distance trade was facilitated by the hundi system. The Multanis and the Sahs of Delhi had become so rich, according to a contemporary historian, that gold and silver were found only in their houses. Large sections in the towns consisted of slaves. The Turks practised enslavement in war on a large scale. Markets for male and female slaves existed in India as elsewhere in Asia. A small number of slaves came from Africa for domestic and other services. Skilled slaves were valued more than the others. Female slaves were often used for spinning, apart from domestic service. Sultan Firoz Tughluq collected 180,000 slaves and trained them for religious studies or as artisans. Slaves were also used as armed guards.⁶⁷

The process of the growth of towns in India in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was accelerated no doubt by the arrival of the Turks, resulting in the process of political integration. They also helped in opening overland commerce between India, Central Asia, and West Asia. However, historians have shown a tendency to link political developments

closely with the process of urbanization. The fifteenth century was indeed a period of political disintegration in north India, but it was not a period of the decline of towns. The sultanate of Delhi shrank to half its former size under Firoz Tughluq, but there was no shrinkage of towns. In fact, the period witnessed the establishment of many new towns. The growth of towns during the reign of Firoz Tughluq was linked with agricultural expansion through a network of canals. Significantly, Agra was founded by a sultan of Delhi. It is even more important to add that new towns and cities arose in the successor states of the sultanate of Delhi in the fifteenth and the early sixteenth centuries. Towns and cities developed in eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, Malwa, Gujarat, and Rajasthan.⁶⁸

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and part of the eighteenth century, appear to have been 'a veritable golden age of urbanization' for much of northern and central India. There was an expansion in the size of the existing towns and cities and proliferation of new ones. Among the factors that contributed to this process was the establishment of the Mughal empire, which facilitated the expansion of long-distance trade within India, and international trade with Asian and European markets. There was also an enormous expansion of all aspects of textile manufacturing and marketing. The development was not uniform. Some centres prospered more than others. Cities like Patna and Benaras benefited from the growth of trade and manufactures. In fact, western Uttar Pradesh appears to have developed more now than the Punjab in terms of urbanization.⁶⁹

The cities and towns of the Mughal empire fulfilled diverse and overlapping roles. The largest of them were thriving centres of manufacturing and marketing, banking and entrepreneurial activities. There was a whole network of communications by land and water, which crossed and recrossed the subcontinent and extended to south-east Asia, the Middle East, and western Europe. In the regional or sub-regional contexts, smaller urban centres performed a more modest role in relation to local commerce, resources, and needs. Almost everywhere in the empire one could see weaving and the auxiliary crafts connected with the manufacture of textiles. A number of metropolitan cities derived their prosperity partly from their role as political centres and administrative headquarters, as capitals of the empire or temporary residence of the emperor. What Delhi or Agra were for the empire as a whole, Patna was for Bihar, Burhanpur for Khandesh, and Ahmedabad for Gujarat, the administrative focal point of a province or a region. There were other cities and towns that had a sacral significance, complementing or transcending their economic or political importance, like Benaras or Nasik, or even Ajmer. Whatever their individual characteristics, the cities and towns served as the repositories of higher culture and learning, serving as reservoirs, in which the Sanskrit and Indo-Islamic traditions were preserved, and as conduits, through which those traditions were transmitted to society as a whole.⁷⁰

We have more information about the urban centres of the Mughal period than about those of the period of the sultanate of Delhi: their number, size, location, morphology, demography, trade, production, functions, and administration.⁷¹ The administration of the town, for example, had two major aspects: general administration and fiscal administration. There were two sets of officials for general administration, with responsibility in the town and outside the town. The town was administered by a kotwal who had very wide responsibilities. Some of his duties were shared by the muhtasib. For the maintenance of law and order outside the city, there were faujdars, qiladars, and thanadars. The first two defended the town and protected the roads leading to the towns. The authority of the qiladar was confined to the fort, which usually housed the royal treasury and stores of grain; it also served as a state prison. The two kinds of officials were appointed directly from the court and they were independent of each other. An independent source of information

was provided by officials known collectively as the *akhbarnavis* who were posted at all administrative headquarters and were required to report on the abuse of authority, collection of illegal taxes, oppression, and tyranny by officials. There are known instances of the local officials being dismissed, transferred, or punished by reduction in mansab or even being imprisoned as a result of the reports of the *akhbarnavis*.⁷²

For the administration of justice the towns had a court of the qazi assisted by a *mufti*. The qazi investigated accusations, examined witnesses, and pronounced judgement. He could direct the kotwal to apprehend an alleged offender. The code of laws operative in the qazi's court was the codified Muslim law generally known as the sharia. The qazis were appointed directly from the imperial headquarters, and the local officials were not expected to interfere with their work. In fact, there are known cases of local officials being punished on the basis of the reports of the qazis. However, the judgements of the qazi's court were not always impartial or fair. In many cases the qazis were found indulging in corruption, accepting bribes from one or both parties.⁷³

For fiscal purposes the small towns were treated as single units, but the cities were divided into a number of mahals, depending upon the multiplicity of their activity. Cities like Agra, Delhi, Lahore, Ahmedabad, Surat, Burhanpur, and Aurangabad contained several mahals, each with a considerable annual income. The articles taxed were mostly cloth, leather, foodstuffs, grain, oil, ghee, sugar, medicine, drugs, tobacco, horses, camels, cows, gold, silver, and all other commodities that were bought or sold. Taxes were realized from shops. The privilege of collecting the taxes was that of the state, but mahals could be alienated by way of a jagir or given on ijara. If under the Crown, each mahal had the officials like the darogha, amin, mushrif, tahwildar, qanungo, and mutasaddi. They were appointed by the diwan at the court on the recommendation of the provincial *diwan*. These officials were supported by a large number of foot-soldiers and peons. If assigned to a jagirdar, the assignee collected the taxes through his agents and maintained custom chowkis around the city. He was not allowed to exercise general administration or to make any changes in the fiscal structure of the town. In actual practice, the *gomashtas* of the jagirdars could adopt several means to extort more than what was allowed. Like the imperial government, the jagirdar could farm out a mahal on contract (ijara). The ijaradar tried to collect as much as he could. Though direct management was seldom free from corruption or high-handedness, the people of the towns preferred direct management to jagir or ijara. There were two other agencies in the town: the chaudhari and the dalal. The former helped the administration regulate commerce and to assist the tax-collectors. The latter arranged bargains and prepared a record of sales, market rates; and other related matters. The mint and the custom house were generally treated as separate fiscal units.⁷⁴

The extent of urbanization in the Mughal empire is generally believed to be larger than what it was in the sultanate of Delhi, not only in terms of the number and size of towns and cities, but also in terms of the proportion of urban population in the total. On the basis of the data available for the revenues of the towns and cities in the context of the total revenues of the empire, it has been argued that towards the end of the sixteenth century the urban population was 15 per cent of the total population of the empire. On the basis of the same data, it has also been argued that a few provinces or regions of the Mughal empire were more urbanized than the others. Among the more urbanized areas were Gujarat, Agra, Rajasthan, and the Punjab, in descending order.⁷⁵

The view that there was a correspondence between de-urbanization and the decline of the Mughal empire during the eighteenth century has been largely modified. 'In urban history there is hardly an obvious correlation between the course of dynastic or military

events and the factors that determined the rise and fall of urban economies and cultures: it is exceptional for a change of ruler, or even a decisive military engagement, to possess much long-range significance in the life of a city extending over many centuries.' Due to the upheavals of the eighteenth century, while manufacturing and commercial life languished in the towns of the upper Gangetic and Yamuna plains, urban life generally flourished in Awadh. Indeed, centres of commerce and manufacturing possessed a *raison d'être* for transcending short-lived political upheavals and revolution.⁷⁶ Some of the large cities of the Mughal empire, like Agra, Delhi, and Lahore, suffered decline sooner or later during the eighteenth century; some other cities also had a similar experience; and some of the urban centres were ruralized. At the same time, new urban centres came up in the successor states, which replaced the Mughal empire during the eighteenth century. For a proper perspective on urbanization during the eighteenth century, it is necessary to keep in view the simultaneity of de-urbanization and urbanization in different parts of the Mughal empire. The point has been well argued in relation to Uttar Pradesh during the late eighteenth century.⁷⁷

According to Burton Stein, the old cities of Madurai and Thanjavur became fortified places between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. Double walls, moats, and bastions lent great strength to these places. Plans of the cities of the eighteenth century show that they contained several temples, bazaars, palaces, and garrison buildings for soldiers and their mounts. Within each city and also outside its walls there were residential clusters for townsfolk. Many urban places were both temple cities and fortified cities. The temples themselves were great walled places with towering gateways. The series of walls enclosing walkways within the temple complex gave the appearance of a fortified place. Understandably, a considerable use was made of such temples in the warfare of the French and British during the eighteenth century. 'It is possible that the warrior supporters of medieval temple religion may have considered the walls of temples as part of the defensive works of cities under their control.'⁷⁸

The successor states to the Vijayanagar empire were not based in new towns but reverted to established central places: Thanjavur, Madurai, Vellore, and Mysore, for example. In eighteenth-century Deccan the political centre shifted from Bijapur, Golkonda, and the Raichur doab to Hyderabad; the new state of Mysore was established; and the increase in economic activity was linked to ports on the Coromandal coast. Srirangapattanam, the capital of Mysore, had a population of more than 150,000, and Thanjavur had a population of 100,000. The fort of Sivagiri in the 1760s had 10,000 houses. Tiruchirapalli and Bangalore had numerous gardens. The thoroughfares in cities of the south were generally wide to accommodate royal and religious processions and to celebrate weddings. Descriptions of Indian methods of building indicate that this was a continuous activity in the eighteenth century. Even a small town like Gubbi in Mysore, which had only 360 houses, had 154 shops. The reports of 'ruined' towns in the south come from the early nineteenth century. Significantly, a sample taken from the districts of eastern India showed the fall of urban population as a little over 6 per cent between 1813 and 1872.⁷⁹

V

Information about some of the regions of north India during the Mughal period is not without interest. More than sixty urban centres can be identified in the province of Gujarat during the seventeenth century. Three of these had a population of over 200,000:

Ahmedabad, Surat, and Broach. Four of the urban centres had a population of over 50,000: Cambay, Baroda, Anhilwarapatan, and Somnath. About twenty towns had a population of over 25,000 and nearly thirty towns had a population of nearly 10,000. The cities of Ahmedabad, Surat, and Broach were important centres of textiles and other industries. Ahmedabad was a great commercial emporium. Baroda too was a town of great trade, especially in textile goods. Surat, Broach, and even Cambay remained port cities of prime importance. Surat was a great commercial centre not only of Gujarat but also of India. It served as a collecting centre of textiles and other goods from different parts of the Mughal empire, the kingdoms of Golkonda and Bijapur, and from places like Ahmedabad, Burhanpur, Daulatabad, Bijapur, Golkonda, Agra, Lahore, Patna, Benaras, and Dhaka. The smaller towns served as markets for their hinterlands, and as hinterland for the large cities. The growth of cities and towns of all categories continued throughout the seventeenth century; the commercial and industrial activities of the cities became more important than their administrative functions. The major cities and towns of Gujarat came to have links with the major cities and towns of the rest of the country. The small towns played a vital role in the economy of Gujarat.⁸⁰

According to H.K. Naqvi, urban centres in the Punjab appeared to have flourished more during the Mughal period than earlier. In contemporary sources there are frequent references to Lahore, Sirhind, Rohtas, Gujarat, Sialkot, Batala, Qasur, Patti, Jullundur, Sultanpur, Kalanaur, Sheikhupura, Bajwara, Ludhiana, Behlolpur, and Samana. Akbar founded new centres like Attock and Gujarat. Several cities of the region were well known for their trade and manufactures. A large section of the urban population was employed in production and distribution. The trading class is specially stated to have been large in number. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the urban middle class in the Punjab assumed considerable size and became virtually the economic backbone of the towns. The urban intelligentsia became the main repository and the disseminating agency of learning, culture, and language.⁸¹

Naqvi dwells on de-urbanization in the Punjab during the decline of the Mughal empire and the establishment of Sikh rule during the eighteenth century. It is true that some of the urban centres were ruined and many others were reduced in size. At the same time, most of the old urban centres were sought to be revived and a large number of new administrative centres were founded which developed into towns. Quite a few new cities emerged before the end of the eighteenth century. The most conspicuous among them was Amritsar, which was destined to become larger than Lahore in the early nineteenth century. The simultaneous process of de-urbanization and urbanization in the province of Lahore comes out clearly in Ganesh Das's *Char Bagh-i Punjab*.⁸²

In Bengal, there was a significant shift in the pattern of urbanization during the period of Mughal rule. The capital of Bengal had been shifted several times before: from Gaur to Pandua in the fourteenth century, back to Gaur in the fifteenth century, and from Gaur to Tanda in the sixteenth. During the Mughal period the capital was shifted to Rajmahal and Dhaka, and then to Murshidabad in the early eighteenth century. All these capital cities flourished successively for several centuries, marking a shift towards the delta. Similarly, Satgaon remained the chief port of Bengal for several centuries before it yielded place to Hooghly and Sonargaon, near Dhaka. The shift in the capital city and the chief ports of Bengal was symbolic of the shift in urban centres in general. The fall of Gaur and the decline of Satgaon were neither isolated nor sudden events. The political climate of the port-metropolis axis had been disturbed for several decades before the Mughals brought Hooghly under their control. A process of de-urbanization on the banks of the Bhagirathi

river had set in, obliging people to move towards Bahti even before Hooghly grew as a port. Their movement towards Bahti generated a new urban process that was linked with expansion of agriculture as well as foreign trade.⁸³

There is interesting evidence on the social structure in the pargana towns of Sujat, Jaitran, and Merta of Rajasthan during the seventeenth century. The total population for Sujat was over 10,000. More than 7,000 were considered by the contemporaries as belonging to the upper class, consisting of Rajputs, Brahmans, Mahajans, landowners (*karsas*), and Musalmans. Among the upper castes, the Mahajans represented nearly 45 per cent of the population. The total population of Jaitran was more than 8,000 of which more than 5,000 belonged to the upper class among which the Mahajans formed more than 60 per cent of the population. Merta had a total population of nearly 24,500 of which more than 14,500 belonged to the upper class. The percentage of Mahajans among the upper class was nearly 67. The Mahajans belonged to different communities like Oswals, Maheshwaris, Agarwals, and Khandelwals. The large proportion of Mahajans in the urban population of Rajasthan clearly reflected the dominance of commercial activities in the towns. The state gave them encouragement in terms of concessions and protection.⁸⁴

However, the trading communities did not form the urban elite who were mainly associated with service in the army and civil administration, represented by Rajputs and Musalmans. Many large jagirdars lived in pargana towns. Their proportion in the population of the towns ranged from 3 to 7 per cent, but the political and administrative powers rested with them, and they also had purchasing power due to income from their jagirs which were located elsewhere. Among the Marwar nobility, a number of Muslims also enjoyed positions of power. For this reason they were regarded as upper class, though Muslim traders coming to these towns from outside were regarded as lower class. The elite families of Rajputs and Muslims were clearly above the rest of the upper class, which included Brahmans as well as the trading communities and landowners.⁸⁵

A substantial portion of the population of these towns consisted of artisans, craftsmen, and labourers, all of whom belonged to the lower class in the eyes of their contemporaries. In Sujat the number of artisans and craftsmen was nearly 1,000. In other words, they represented about 10 per cent of the total population. Most of them were connected with textiles and the leather industry, followed by goldsmiths and blacksmiths. In Jaitran the number of artisans and craftsmen was more than 1,200. They formed 15 per cent of the total population. The weavers alone represented more than half of the artisanal population, which included oil-pressers as well as leather-workers, goldsmiths, and blacksmiths. In Merta the number of artisans and craftsmen was nearly 3,500. They represented about 14 per cent of the total population. The number of craftsmen associated with textiles was the largest, nearly 2,000, followed at a distance by the leather-workers, goldsmiths, oil-pressers, and blacksmiths. The large proportion of artisans and craftsmen in the towns of Rajasthan clearly reflected the importance of manufactures, especially textiles, leather goods, and jewellery. The total number of communities and occupational groups in both the upper and the lower classes was quite numerous. It is clear, nonetheless, that traders and craftsmen formed the backbone of the urban centres of western Rajasthan during the seventeenth century.⁸⁶

Three major institutions have been identified in the cities of Gujarat. One of these was the *pol*. In Ahmedabad, which was dominated by aristocracy in its founding stages, the middle- and poor-class residential streets or *muhallas* came to be formed by people belonging to a single caste or a particular town or a village. They occupied a contiguous area and gave it a name indicating its exclusiveness. Most of residential streets or *muhallas* were

organized on this basis in Gujarat. Each unit or pol had its own representative body, which became progressively formal as the pol organization. In fact, the existence of such units in other parts of the country seems to be recognized by the *Ain-i Akbari* which prescribes that the kotwal should appoint a superintendent for every locality (*mir-i muhalla*). It is evident that official administration was sought to be mediated by grassroot institutions. Since each locality was physically a separate unit, the pol and its organization became crucial to urban life. The city became a federation of these pols which were primarily residential.⁸⁷

The pol organizations were supplemented by associations of merchants and craftsmen, known as mahajans. Once again, the *Ain-i Akbari* refers to guilds of artificers, for each of which the kotwal should appoint a master (*sar-i giroh*). In Gujarat mahajans are known to have existed in Ahmedabad, Surat, Baroda, Broach, Navasari, and Mahuva. The mahajans were concerned primarily and almost exclusively with occupational regulation, the head of a mahajan, known as *sheth*, was advised by an informal group of elders. He maintained the traditional craft ethos within the group, regulated trade relations, and laid down the price line. He was the spokesman for the mahajan in its relation with the outside world. The officials dealt with the mahajan through the sheth. Sometimes, tension arose between them. The mahajans could hold out the threat of closing down shops or leaving the town. The mahajans federated into a town mahajan, with the *nagarsheth* as its head. His office tended to become hereditary, and in places like Surat he acquired a ritual position. He mediated between the different mahajans as an arbitrator. However, he could not intervene in the internal matters of the different mahajans.

The third major institution was the caste panchayat, which regulated the internal affairs of the caste. The three institutions could overlap in terms of their membership, but their functions were different and their identity was distinct. They acted as powerful levers for maintaining the status quo, and thus discouraged initiative and innovation. At the same time the mahajans maintained standards, minimized tensions, and provided their members with a shield in difficult times. The mahajans of bricklayers, basket-makers, weavers, and leather-workers could argue on a footing of equality with high-caste mahajans, which invested the humble artisans with a sense of dignity. However, these institutions remained largely on the social and economic plane and did not become a part of the political system.⁸⁸

As far as individual towns go, much more attention has been given to large cities than to towns, whether large or small. Among the large cities, capitals of states and provinces have received more attention. The early history of Agra, its growth during the Mughal period, its trade and manufactures, its administration, and social structure have been studied in some detail. Though the study of Agra does not go beyond the seventeenth century, it does point out to the fact that Agra did not decline as a centre of commerce and manufactures after the capital was shifted by Shah Jahan from Agra to Delhi. It also underlines that the people of the city interacted in many ways irrespective of their religious affiliations and occupational positions. There was religious freedom and social harmony, and different communities participated in the celebration of social and religious occasions irrespective of their economic, social, and religious differences. A kind of common urban culture was emerging, shared by many persons in the city.⁸⁹

The history of the city of Delhi during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries has been clearly outlined. The site of Qila Rai Pithora became the nucleus of the city founded by Qutbuddin Aibak in 1192. The main features of the new city were a new fort, the Jami Masjid with the Qutb Minar, a madrasa, a cloth market, and a reservoir for water supply. A suburb developed at Ghayaspur during the reign of Sultan Ghayasuddin Balban. The present dargah

of Nizamuddin Auliya, which was established in this suburb, fixes its location. Between this settlement and the Yamuna was built a palace named Kilokheri by Balban's grandson and successor, Muizzuddin Kaikubad. A new city was developed around this palace by Sultan Jalaluddin Khalji in the early 1290s. A stone fort was also built here. The threat of Mongol invasions in the early fourteenth century obliged Sultan Alauddin Khalji to build Siri in a waste ground close to the old city of Delhi to its north-east. At the same time, the sultan paid great attention to the old city which became more important than Siri. He excavated a new tank known as Hauz-i Khas or Hauz-i Alai. Thus, in the early fourteenth century, the old Delhi represented the city, with Siri as its isolated extension. Sultan Ghayasuddin Tughluq laid out yet another settlement, named Tughlaqabad. A tank and a fort were built near this city by Sultan Muhammad Tughluq. The old city of Delhi continued to grow and Muhammad Tughluq planned a wall to enclose the entire area between old Delhi and Siri; this enclosure was named Jahanpanah. The transfer of the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad in the reign of Muhammad Tughluq had an adverse effect on the city of Delhi. Its decline during the reign of Firoz Tughluq (1351–88) became perceptible. Firoz Tughluq built his own capital close to the river Yamuna. Known as Firozabad, it covered the land of eighteen villages. The city extended further northwards upto the base of the Ridge between modern Sabzi Mandi and the Civil Lines. The old city was depopulated by now and the settlements founded after Firozabad were all close to the river rather than the Aravalli ridge.⁹⁰

New cities were founded by Sher Shah and Humayun but far more important was the city of Shahjahanabad founded by Shah Jahan in 1639 and completed in 1648. Stephen P. Blake has studied the city of Shahjahanabad, paying attention to the cityscape, society, economy, and culture from 1639 to 1739 before outlining the aftermath of imperium from 1739 to 1857. The author states in the preface that the 'sovereign city' of Shahjahanabad was the capital of 'the patrimonial-bureaucratic empire'. In this type of a state the ruler tried to assimilate the state to his household: 'he attempted to administer, control and finance the entire realm as if it were part of his own private domain'. The Mughal emperor dominated the social, economic, and cultural life of the city, just as he dominated its built form. The city was an enormously extended patriarchal household, 'the imperial palace-fortress writ large'. It was the kingdom in miniature. The palace-fort stood for the city and the mansions of great nobles for the provinces, districts, and other subdivisions of the state. It is not surprising that the cityscape, society, economy, and culture of Shahjahanabad in Blake's book remains confined to the court and the people directly connected with the court. His approach and assumptions place a serious limitation on the scope of his study. Blake also asserts that the city declined after 1739 as a direct result of the collapse of the empire. Consequently, the story of Shahjahanabad during the late eighteenth century is one of 'destruction, misery, and heartache'.⁹¹

A more recent study of Shahjahanabad seeks to outgrow the limitations of Blake's work. Shama Mitra Chenoy is consciously critical of the framework in which Blake has studied Shahjahanabad. Mitra Chenoy points out that, for Blake, the city had a dynamism of its own, but it was linked directly to the physical presence of the emperor and the nobility. 'Otherwise the city was put in dustcovers and shut like a mansion in the proprietor's absence.' Furthermore, the palace, fortress, and havelis of the nobles dominated the cityscape and functioned as self-contained units, providing for all the needs and extravagances of the inmates and those dependent on them. 'Essentially then, people bound to the king and nobles in a patron-client relationship were the only ones who lived in the city.'⁹²

The scope of Mitra Chenoy's work is pretty large. Apart from the considerations for shifting the capital from Agra to Delhi, the cityscape of Shahjahanabad in the reign of

Shah Jahan is delineated as the starting point in a separate chapter. The changes in the cityscape from 1659 to 1857 are discussed in another. One more chapter is given to the suburbs of Shahjahanabad before a discussion of markets, shops, manufactories, and trade. The settlement patterns and the life of the people are discussed in separate chapters. The study is not confined to the royalty and the nobility, and their dependents; it is extended to the traders, the artisans and craftsmen, the professional people, and the general populace. The author argues that Shahjahanabad continued to be populous and a thriving city even after the heyday of Mughal rule with several definite functions. The city was the capital of a large empire, but it was also a place of immense importance for all economic activities and a centre for pilgrimage. When the Mughal empire began to totter, some functions of the city lost their primacy, but others assumed greater significance. Shahjahanabad was a centre of production not merely of voluptuary goods, but also of other commodities. Heavy bulk goods as well as expensive commodities found a ready market in the city. The people who made the city their permanent abode were the ones who imparted a vigour to it even in the absence of glamour of the court. The talented artists, poets, and literateurs of the city set high standards for others to emulate. A glimpse into the lives of the people of Shahjahanabad suggests that the lifestyle pursued by a broad cross-section of society had several common threads that bound them together and imparted a distinctiveness to the city.⁹³

There are two contemporary accounts of Shahjahanabad that throw some light on the city during the eighteenth century: the *Muraqqa-i Dehli* of Dargah Quli Khan, written in 1738–39, and the *Sair al-Manazil* of Sangin Beg, written in 1811–27. The first work indicates that, while many localities were predominantly inhabited by a single community, people lived in close proximity irrespective of their religion, caste, or occupation. The Shias and Sunnis celebrated Muharram as a common festival; Hindus and Muslims visited the dargah of Shaikh Nasiruddin, popularly called *Chiragh-i Dehli* at the time of the festival of lights during the month of Diwali; and Majnun Nanak Shahi observed the tenth of Muharram. People from all walks of life came to the *taziakhana* of Imam Husain. Dargah Quli Khan's description of the Chandni Chowk indicates that it was the premier place for pleasure and entertainment, with articles and goods of all kinds in the adjoining streets—pearls and gems, perfumes, drugs, arms and daggers, chinaware, glassware, and articles of common use. There were coffee houses (*qahwa-khanas*) where literary persons met regularly to recite their pieces to each other. The great amirs resorted to the Chowk for pleasure. There were many religious places, known by various names, and *qawwalis* were recited at places associated with Sufi saints. Several features of domestic architecture indicate the layout of large mansions. There were detached bungalows (*banglas*) in every locality.

The second work indicates that a number of streets and muhallas survived into the nineteenth century, some of them retaining their traditional features, like Paiwalan near the Jami Masjid where one could buy fireworks, or Chauri Bazaar where one could still find copper and brass vessels. The celebrations of Basant started from the shrine of the footprint of the Prophet, and it was joined by musicians and members of the Hindu and Muslim communities. Many of the religious places, and practices associated with them, survived into the nineteenth century. A number of temples and ghats are mentioned, together with places regarded sacred by the Hindus. There is a reference to Haveli Nagarseth. The *shahr ashob* of Sauda laments the departure of Mir Taqi Mir to Lucknow, and Mir Taqi himself was nostalgic about Delhi, 'a city select of the World where the elite of the times lived'. Celebration of its past was the poet's compliment to the city he was reluctant to leave.⁹⁴

If some cities went down in a period of political change, others came up, including a number of capital cities. One such example was Pune in Maharashtra. Originally a small village in a barren hilly tract, Pune was included in the jagir of Shahji Bhonsle. Shahu conferred it on Peshwa Bajirao in 1725 and it started growing as the de facto capital of the expanding Maratha confederation. In 1764–65 it had a population of about 14,000. Twenty years later it was nearly 200,000. Traders and skilled artisans were attracted to the city by various concessions and guarantees, and people came from far and near: Gujarat, Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Andhra, as well as Marathawad. Among them were soldiers, clerks, messengers, scholars, and priests as well as artisans and traders. The Bohras had come from Ahmadnagar, Ahmedabad, and Aurangabad in the seventeenth century as traders in ironware and glassware. Blacksmiths came in the eighteenth century when arms were in demand. The local carpenters were joined by outsiders (*pardeshis*). At the end of the eighteenth century the peshwas and their nobles constructed mansions and temples on a large scale, and skilled masons came from Andhra. A paper industry was started in Pune by immigrant artisans. Perfume-makers flocked to the city. Weavers came in the early nineteenth century before the city suffered a great setback in 1818, and its population was reduced to about 110,000, which was to decline further. However, the city survived partly because of the decision of the British to adopt Pune as a secondary capital of the Bombay presidency with a major cantonment, and partly because of its background of trade and manufacture, a tradition which enabled Pune to recover even when British interest in the city had waned. However, even in 1901, its population was a little over 110,000.⁹⁵

To illustrate the survival of a town throughout the medieval period we may refer to Sirhind in the Punjab. It was noticed by Hieun Tsang as the capital of a small principality. The conquests of Mahmud of Ghazni up to the river Satluj in the early eleventh century increased the importance of Sirhind as a frontier post. With the establishment of the sultanate of Delhi in the early thirteenth century, Sirhind became eventually the headquarters of a pargana. In the late fourteenth century it became the headquarters of a primary division or province. The Lodis attached great importance to Sirhind as a base of the Afghans. With the establishment of Mughal rule, Sirhind was placed on the highway from Delhi to Lahore. It flourished as a halting place of the emperors, a centre of trade, a place of the Sufis, as well as the headquarters of a sarkar of the Delhi province with a special faujdar to deal with the hill chiefs. Early in the eighteenth century it was taken over by the Sikhs under Banda Bahadur, but soon recovered by the Mughals. It was a rich place when it was sacked and reoccupied by the Sikhs in 1764. The town declined in the late eighteenth century as a part of the dominions of Ala Singh's successors who lived at Patiala as their capital. Incidentally, Patiala came up as a new city at a short distance from Sirhind.⁹⁶

Unlike Sirhind, Batala in the Upper Bari doab of the Punjab, was founded during the medieval period itself, in the late fifteenth century. Unlike Sirhind, Batala did not decline during the late eighteenth or the early nineteenth century under Sikh rule. Founded in the midst of a wasteland that was being reclaimed by a revenue contractor, Batala became the headquarters of a pargana under Afghan rule. Its importance increased during the reign of Akbar not only as an administrative centre, but also as a centre of trade and crafts, and a place of some religious luminaries of Islam. Though sacked by Banda Bahadur in the early eighteenth century, it survived as a walled town with twelve gates. When the Sikhs conquered the province of Lahore in the 1760s, Batala was adopted as a capital by one of the Sikh chiefs. The history of Batala, its morphology, demography, trade and crafts, and the social and cultural life of its people have been outlined in a study, which perhaps is the only study of a medieval Indian town as distinct from the studies of large cities.⁹⁷ John F.

Richards has summed up the findings of this study in several paragraphs in his general history *The Mughal Empire* on the argument that Batala was typical of the hundreds of qasbas that had proliferated in northern India by the 1680s, and fostered a growing gentry class.⁹⁸

The example of Amritsar indicates how a small town could develop into a city due to what is called the political upheaval of the eighteenth century. The town of Ramdasapur was founded by Guru Ram Das during the reign of Akbar as a religious centre. With the increasing importance of the centre as a place of pilgrimage, traders and craftsmen started coming to the town, encouraged by Guru Arjan as well as the founder of the town. A certain degree of political activity was added to the town by Guru Hargobind in the early seventeenth century by adopting soldierly habits and by constructing a fort and the Akal Takht in a township that was administratively an autonomous centre. During the period of the political struggle of the Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh against the Mughals and the Afghans, Ramdasapur became the rallying centre of the Khalsa and therefore a place of contention between the opposing parties. All the important decisions of the Khalsa were taken at the Akal Takht when they visited Ramdasapur in large numbers at the time of Baisakhi and Diwali. After the final triumph of the Khalsa against Ahmad Shah Abdali in the 1760s, while the entire body of the Khalsa started 'serving' the religious institutions of the town with revenue-free lands, a number of Sikh chiefs established their own quarters close to the old town. Some of them built fortresses as well. By 1800 about a dozen townships had come into existence round Ramdasapur, each with its own autonomous administration. In the early decades of the nineteenth century Maharaja Ranjit Singh imposed unity upon this conglomeration of townships. A wide wall with twelve gates was constructed round the city and its administration was entrusted to a government official. It became the premier city of the dominions of the Maharaja as the result of cultural and economic as well as political factors. The city came to be known as Amritsar, a term which was originally confined to the sacred tank with the Harmandir in its midst.⁹⁹

VI

In *Ports and Their Hinterlands in India (1700–1950)* the papers on Masulipattam and Cuddalore highlight the relationship between a rich hinterland and the growth of ports as centres of regional and overseas trade in the eighteenth century. Both the ports prospered under regional powers and in the initial years of European connection. The flourishing agricultural economy, textile manufactures, and trade of the north Coromandal region were gradually reoriented to subserve the demands of the East India Company. After Akbar's conquest of Gujarat in 1572, its ports became much better integrated with the cities of the Mughal empire. Consequently, there were major shifts in trade routes and the patterns of inland trade. Surat grew rapidly at the cost of Cambay, and also of Ahmedabad, which came to play a subordinate role. With the decline of Mughal power began the process of constriction in the hinterland of Surat, leading steadily to its decline. Even the small port towns of north Gujarat had a well-developed network of credit and insurance integrated with the urban centres in the interior. After 1818, when the British took over the region, the money market was substantially curtailed, and export trade was reoriented from manufactures to agrarian produce.¹⁰⁰

The natural factors appeared to be more relevant for the ports than the inland cities. 'Taking a long range view', says Arasaratnam, 'it is possible to trace the rise and fall of ports along the two coasts of India in co-relation with the climatic and physiognomic changes

that have imperceptibly been at work.' There was no instance of a favourable conjunction of the factors that combined to determine the rise and fall of ports on the Indian coastline. There was no harbour favoured by nature as an all-weather haven for ships. The situation only of Goa, Bombay, and Trincomalee Bay was somewhat favourable. For Cochin and Masulipatnam anchorage was possible reasonably close to the harbour. Most of the ports were situated at the estuaries of rivers, or within a few miles of such estuaries. The port town of Surat alone was more than 20 km up the river. In the absence of physical advantages, the major characteristics that determined the fortunes of ports were their location in relation to producing and consuming areas, and to land and sea trade routes. These factors determined also the functions of ports and the nature of their infrastructures. The importance, size, and longevity of a port was determined primarily by its function as a major outlet for a large and productive hinterland. Conversely, when the hinterland shrank, the port lost its importance, sometimes dramatically. Another factor in the development of ports was their place on major trade routes and the entrepot functions they performed. Ports in India did not develop centripetal tendencies: the existence of a number of ports of reasonable activity within close proximity to each other was a remarkable feature of the Indian scene.¹⁰¹

Only a few of the ports developed as urban centres, or had buildings of any degree of magnificence. Neither had the port towns any element of planning in their construction. With the exception of Surat, none of the ports developed defence constructions of any size or effectiveness. None of the ports developed a permanent settled population of people of influence and wealth. Therefore, there were no impressive monuments even of religious nature. The ports that developed as urbanized centres were Surat and Masulipatnam which had substantial residences of wealthy merchants and administrative officials. Calicut and Cochin were capital cities, with several sprawling buildings that lacked magnificence. The proportion of urbanized centres was really very small when we look at the long list of nearly sixty ports from the mouth of the Indus to the mouth of the Ganges. Not all of these ports were of equal importance, and some of them had come under the control of the Europeans.¹⁰²

No port appears to have remained important, or even in existence, throughout the medieval period. The centuries from the tenth to the fifteenth saw a remarkable increase in world trade in which Europe, West Asia, India, South-East Asia, and China were knit together in a complementary exchange of goods, services, people, and culture. Trade was transformed from a low-volume, high-value trade to bulk trade in a variety of commodities of daily consumption. This trade gave rise to some entrepot ports that served as redistribution points for goods. Calicut and Cambay were two good examples of entrepots on the west coast of India. A good example of such a port on the east coast was Masulipatnam, which began to link the trade of the eastern and western sectors of the Indian Ocean in the sixteenth century. On the whole, however, the Gujarat coastal region emerged as a core region of the Indian Ocean trade.

The location of Gujarat within easy access of Arabia and Persia was a great advantage. The emergence of the sultanate of Gujarat in the fifteenth century was another. Cambay grew as the major Gujarati port in the Indian Ocean trade. It served several functions: export of cotton textiles, indigo, and foodgrains produced in the hinterland; it served as conduit for the trans-shipment of Malabar export goods to West Asia, particularly pepper, cardamom, ginger, and cinnamon; it stored and re-exported South-East Asian goods brought in through direct trade. Thus, at the arrival of the Portuguese, Gujarat and its port of Cambay held a dominant position in Indian Ocean trade.¹⁰³

Next to Gujarat in importance as a trading region was Malabar. In fact it had enjoyed a prominent position in long-distance trade considerably earlier than Gujarat. It was overtaken by Gujarat only in the thirteenth century. Malabar derived its importance from its location on the trade routes and its production of pepper and spices. However, it did not have the advantage of a large and rich hinterland that was enjoyed by Gujarat. Malabar had an active coastal trade to Coromandal and to Sri Lanka. The backbone of indigenous maritime enterprise in Malabar were the Mapillahs, a Muslim community of Malabar. The trade of Coromandal was on the rise under the Cholas during the early centuries of the medieval period, with Nagapatnam as the chief port. The rise of Vijayanagar gave a fresh fillip to trade.

The Portuguese did not destroy the existing trade network, nor did they seriously alter trade patterns. The most drastic initial effect was the destruction of Arab interests. The Mappilah merchants and Gujaratis replaced the Arabs. The role of Cambay as an entrepot was enhanced at the expense of Calicut. Another merchant group that benefited from the Portuguese hostility to Arabs was that of the Coromandal Chettis and Konkanis. When the Portuguese captured the port of Diu in 1554, they were enabled to dictate terms to the trade of Gujarat and to influence the trade of the Indus delta. Goa became more important after its conquest by the Portuguese. There was no major change in patterns and direction of trade in the Bay of Bengal. The rise of Golkonda brought a new port into existence: Masulipatnam. The Portuguese secured permission in 1538 from the sultan of Bengal to settle in Satgaon and Chittagong for trade; their influence grew thereafter. In 1580 Akbar permitted them to settle and trade in Hooghly; the bulk of Bengal's overseas trade gradually shifted there from Satgaon. The sixteenth century proved to be an eventful one in the maritime history of India.¹⁰⁴

During the seventeenth century four zones could be identified as the core regions with distinct trading systems, both in their long-distance economic linkages and in their shorter coastal traffic: Gujarat, Malabar-Canara, Coromandal, and Bengal. In contrast to the relative imperviousness of the interior of India, these maritime zones were porous. The Indian states never attempted to regulate their subject's coastal movements. This accessibility was extended to aliens as well. The maritime regions of India acquired certain characteristics different from those of the inland. The people living in the port towns were more plural in terms of their ethnicity, religion, and culture; they were less orthodox and open to innovations and new ideas; there was a greater tolerance of differences, and minority groups continued as self-regulating entities with their own lifestyles. The hinterland of the maritime zones deepened during the seventeenth century, with Gujarat as the most pronounced example. In Coromandal too the hinterland was expanding. Bengal was not sharply divided into 'maritime' and 'inland' because of the nature of its geography. Riverine tracts enabled close integration between waterborne and land traffic. There was a visible improvement in levels of life along the coast, and there was no marked movement of population from the hinterland to the port towns. The growth of population in these towns did not match the expansion of commerce.¹⁰⁵

Of all the port cities of India, we are probably best informed about Surat. Coastal Gujarat has been the home of one major oceanic port supported by a string of others that were less eminent but important. The earliest of the major ports was Broach; it was followed by Cambay, which was replaced by Surat. Cambay had become important as early as the tenth century and was the principal port of Gujarat for about three and a half centuries. Muslim merchants from Arabia and Persia had settled at Cambay before the establishment of the sultanate of Gujarat in the fifteenth century. Cambay remained important till the

early sixteenth century. The port city of Diu on the Kathiawar coast was a strong contender for eminence for a time, but it did not possess the advantage of Surat in terms of regular communication with the hinterland. The pre-eminence of Surat among the ports of India was a gift of the Mughal empire. The hinterland now functioned with the support of a network of land routes, and the Mughal empire nursed the annual pilgrimage to Mecca with Surat as the port of embarkation. The rise of Surat to eminence coincided with the establishment of two other empires in the sixteenth century: the Safvid empire in Persia and the Ottoman empire in the Middle East. The prosperity of Surat was intimately connected with the trade of these two empires. The long-range effect of the Portuguese on Gujarati commerce was the diversion of Gujarat's main trading effort towards the west of Asia, sometime between the 1580s and 1620s. Of the several explanations for the decline of Surat the most important was the simultaneous weakening and collapse of the three great empires, which in the first place had brought the city to its eminence. The political disorders following the death of Aurangzeb isolated Gujarat from the distant parts of the hinterland like Agra, Lahore, and Benaras. A few decades later, Gujarat was overrun by the Marathas. In the 1730s, when the city was isolated from the countryside and the Mughal administrators had lost their source of income, the Safvids were overthrown in Persia. The decline of Surat also meant the decline of a Muslim ship-owning merchant of the city: Abdul Ghafur. Before the mid-eighteenth century the total trade of Surat had fallen by nearly 75 per cent; Indian merchants now traded somewhat less than the British at Surat. Indian trade and Indian merchants lost heavily in the first half of the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁶

Ashin Das Gupta has described the city of Surat at the opening of the eighteenth century in terms of its location, morphological features, administration, demography and social structure, institutions, the economic activities of its people, and their social life. The immediate and the distant hinterland of Surat is also described, with information on the means and the risks of communication. The major articles of trade, among which cotton and indigo were the most important, are also discussed. Besides the Red Sea and Persia, the merchants of Surat traded with Malabar coast and Bengal. They imported a large amount of bullion, especially from the markets of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. Two of the important imports from Bengal were silk and sugar, including sugar candy. Thus, a wide and complex network of trade stretching over large areas in northern and western India, and touching most parts of maritime Asia, was operated by merchants who lived in Surat. Numerically small, the Muslim merchants of the city enjoyed considerable social and economic importance. The most numerous among them were Bohras, though some Arab, Mughal, Persian, and Turkish merchants also lived in the city. Abdul Ghafur was immensely rich and lived well, but without ostentation. His lifestyle was like that of several other Muslim merchants who led the life of aristocrats. This was not true of the Hindu and Jain merchants who formed the large majority of the merchants of Surat. There was considerable fragmentation and tension in the social life of the city. A crucial position in the economic life of Surat was held by money-changers and brokers. There were associations of nearly all the communities and occupations, but there was no common organization to take care of their basic, mutual interests. Indeed, the basis of even the professional organizations was social and religious. Professional organizations emerged after a particular profession or community had attained a commanding position. Each mahajan had its sheth, and the professional mahajans had their nagarsheth. The Mughal administration of Surat was always interested in the chief men of all such organizations because they were the links between the government and the people. In this respect, the nagarsheth was the most important functionary in the city as the bridge between the emperor and the largest

section of the citizens. The imperial government took little interest in trade though it was concerned about the revenues of the port and the welfare of the pilgrims. Several noble-men owned ships and invested money in trade. On the whole, the merchants of Surat formed a powerful community, with individuals of sufficient influence to counteract official tyranny. And they could mount an agitation to convulse the city. But basically they were on the fringes of the vast subcontinental society that surrounded them.¹⁰⁷

Two other port towns have been studied in some detail: Masulipatnam by Sinappah Arasaratnam and Cambay by Aniruddha Ray.¹⁰⁸ Apart from the commercial and administrative histories of these two cities, the authors have something to say about their morphology, demography, and their relationship with the changing political structures. Both the ports played active roles in the Indian Ocean regional trading systems, and in both of them the state systems in which they were located had an important impact on their operations and longevity. The sultanate of Gujarat helped the port, but the Mughal preference for Surat affected Cambay adversely. However, Cambay continued to play an important role in the overseas trade of the Mughal empire. When the Marathas established themselves in the region, Cambay was drawn into an intricate political tangle, and its trade ebbed and flowed according to the political conditions. Masulipatnam too underwent an important change. After the intense phase of its trade from the 1620s and the 1680s as the only port of Golkonda, it became one of the several ports available to the Mughals for overseas trade. This change was relevant for the decline of Masulipatnam. One common element in the decline of both Cambay and Masulipatnam was the presence and activity of the Europeans, especially the East India Company. It was not simply a 'free-trade' competition in which the merchants of these port towns were ruined and turned into miserable compradors; at all crucial turns, the Company deployed force on land and seized ships in order to claim and enforce privileges, and to subvert indigenous authorities. The studies of Arasaratnam and Ray, like the work of Ashin Das Gupta, are extremely important. They are full of new information and insights. It is only through such detailed and in-depth studies that 'the larger hypotheses can be tested, sustained or challenged'.¹⁰⁹

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CHAPTER 26

Slavery

Irfan Habib

I

Servitude came to exist in ancient societies with the beginning of a surplus produce above the barest requirements of subsistence. Those who had the requisite power could then coerce the weaker to submit to their control and provide manual service and labour to produce goods for their use. The relations of subjection could take diverse forms, depending upon the social structure through which dominance was exercised: imposition of a tax or rent on the peasant, in the name of the state or by virtue of a claim to property in land, often originally obtained by labour; forcible exaction of labour and services; helotage or serfdom, or the tying of peasants and labourers to particular persons or lands or localities; and, finally, slavery. By slavery is meant the total subjection of an individual to the authority of another, the master, for the latter's advantage. It implies always an ownership of one individual vesting with another. In societies where market relations begin to prevail, the slave tends to appear like any other commodity, and so becomes subject to sale or mortgage at the will of the master. That slaves were human beings could not entirely be disregarded by custom or law, but little was often conceded to them except a recommendation of kind treatment to the master.

Slavery was an institution that came to be fairly well developed in ancient India.¹ According to the *Manusmriti* of the first century BC, or earlier, slaves could be gifted, bought, and sold, and, being articles of property, were inherited. Their numbers were added to by the enslavement of those captured in war, of such persons as offered themselves as slaves out of their own need for subsistence, and of those free men who were enslaved by way of punishment. Slaves could have no property of their own; their earnings and property belonged entirely to the master. The master also owned the offspring of his own slave-girl, by whomsoever begotten, a rule by which female slaves are classed with cows, mares, etc. But if a Shudra master himself begot a son by his own female slave, the son would have a share in inheritance and so be presumably free. There is a recommendation that slaves

should be shown indulgence. It is assumed that slaves were of the Shudra caste, and food cooked by them could be eaten by their Brahman master.²

R. S. Sharma has shown that there were certain important alterations in the rules for slaves by the end of the Gupta period (c. AD 500 AD), such as emphasis on 'impure' work being assigned to slaves, for example, 'sweeping the gateway, the privy, the road, removing the leavings of food, ordure, wine, etc., and rubbing the master's limbs'. It is assumed that a slave could be a Kshatriya or Vaishya as well as Shudra, since, according to a commentary on the *dharmaśāstra* of Yajñavalkya, such persons, when made slaves without their consent, ought to be released. It is implied that they could sell themselves into slavery of their own choice. Slaves 'could be beaten, put in fetters and were considered unreliable' and they had 'no right to property'.³

What the reality with regard to slaves was in early medieval India is brought forcefully by four documents, all dated AD 1230–31, from the Chaulukya kingdom of Gujarat, preserved in the *Lekhapaddhati*. These relate to the separate acquisitions of four female slaves. Of these, two were girls, both sixteen years of age, and were obtained as captives in attacks on a 'foreign country' in one case and on Maharashtra in the other. Both were torn away from their families though the first had had even a husband when enslaved. Their caste is not given, but there is no indication that they were of very low caste, and the high price of the first (504 *drammas*, as against sixty for the second) seems to suggest she belonged to a high caste. The other two documents show two girls, one of ten years, the other of twelve, giving themselves into slavery. The first was of the *rajaputra* caste, who, owing to famine and raids by the mlechhas (Turks) and Rashtrakutas, had been abandoned by her family, including her husband, who now lived by begging. The other had been widowed, and had lost her parents and brothers. Both now threw themselves on the mercy of their acquirers. Except for the last case, persons who now became the masters of the four slave-girls are named and are described as merchants (*sreshthi*, etc.).

The work that the female slaves had to perform is described in all the four documents, the descriptions being by and large similar. This included, as listed in the first document, 'cutting, grinding, smearing the floor [with cowdung], carrying water, etc., throwing away human excreta, milking the cow, buffalo and goat, churning the curd and carrying buttermilk to the field, and field-work, such as bringing the fodder, weeding, cutting grass, etc.' That such work, including removal of excreta, could be taken from a slave of the *rajaputra* caste and that 'clean' work, like churning the curd, could be taken from a person also engaged in such 'polluting' work as cleaning privies and the gutter, suggests that caste taboos were not so strong in these matters. However, what is important is the heavy burden of work thrown on the slave-girls' shoulders.

The master's obligation was only to provide the slave-girl with food and clothing, 'according to custom and his capacity'. His rights over her person were complete. He was entitled 'to tie up, beat or strike her cruelly', or to 'punish her by kicking and catching her by the hair and tying up and beating her'. If after such torture or humiliation, she committed suicide, she would be deemed to have become 'a she-ass, bitch or Chāṇḍālī [outcaste woman]', while the master would be held to be as pure as if he had had a bath in the Ganga! The formula is repeated in three of the four documents.

The slave had almost no rights. She could not be approached by her relations, including her husband. She could be sold and gifted away or sent for profit to another country. Even if a *rajaputri*, her caste was deemed to be of no account once she had been enslaved.⁴

We know much less about male slaves, since no similar records about them have been preserved. That they existed is not in dispute: the *Lekhapaddhati* itself counts *dāsa*s and

dāsīs, male and female slaves, among articles of property due to be inherited by two brothers.⁵ There is no reason to believe that conditions of the dāsas were any better than those of dāsīs.

II

Slavery in India must have been affected by the Ghorian invasions around the close of the twelfth century, and the establishment and expansion of the Delhi sultanate, but exactly in what ways and to what degree cannot easily be answered. Islam too accepted the status of slave as fully legal: the master was the owner, and the slave, male or female, could be sold and gifted away, as well as inherited. A man could have any number of concubines, which meant he could force sexual relationships upon all his female slaves. The slaves could have no property of their own, all their possessions and earnings being those of the master. The stock of hereditary slaves could be enlarged by captives obtained in war and by purchase. In theory free Muslims could not be turned into slaves, even by their will, but in practice this rule was often violated.⁶ Badāūnī (1591) held the sale of free-born persons to be an evil prevalent among the Muslims even more than among other communities.⁷ In the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries the Turkmen who were themselves Muslims became notorious for raiding Muslim villages and capturing and selling away the captives in the marts of Central Asia. And they had good robust predecessors in the same trade.

The life of the ordinary slaves in Islamic societies outside India could, therefore, have hardly been enviable; only the presence of what may be termed *elite*-slaves modifies the picture somewhat.⁸ This category of slaves is rarely met with in other cultures, except perhaps China, where court eunuchs exercised considerable influence in the days of its empires. This kind of slavery received much impetus from the demand for skilled Turkish soldiers and officers. Turks seized in childhood were imparted training in the martial arts, and in manners and etiquette of cultured life and given conventional education to make them a valuable commodity when they came of age. Purchased at high prices, they would be put in the army to become officers and commanders.⁹ Ultimately, as happened in Egypt and India, some of them could ascend the throne as sultans. Yet such slave-aristocracies had little bearing on how the mass of slaves lived and worked in society at large.

Since both in India and the Islamic lands the seizure of captives was deemed a legitimate prize of war, it should not come as a surprise that the success of military campaigns of the Ghorians and the Delhi sultans were often judged by the number of captives that they produced. Hasan Nizāmī (1217) tells us that Qutbuddin Aibak's invasion of Gujarat in 1195 brought in 20,000 slaves; his raid on Kalinjar in 1202 had '50,000 slaves brought in chains'.¹⁰ Similarly, Minhāj Sirāj (1259) tells us that 'countless horses and slaves' were obtained by Balban as a result of his raid on Ranthambhor in 1253.¹¹ Baranī (1357) reports that when 'Alāuddīn Khaljī (1296–1316) sent Malik Kāfūr on his great expedition to the Deccan (1310–11), it was assumed that 'horses and slaves' would form a significant amount of the booty.¹²

Once the sultanate was established, suppression of internal defiance and expeditions to extort tribute or revenue within its own limits similarly brought in slaves. Baranī records how Balban's raids in the doab during his reign as sultan (1266–86) brought in so many slaves and heads of cattle as to make their prices fall in the Delhi markets.¹³ Shaikh Nizāmuddīn recalled in 1316 how his teacher in his youth had an old woman slave, newly

captured from the rebellious area (mawās) of Katehr, near Badaun.¹⁴ In 1354 Shaikh Naṣīruddīn told the story of how in the time of Shaikh Farid (d.1265) the governor of Ajodhan (Pakpattan, Punjab) raided a village, making all its inhabitants captive, including the wife of a well-to-do dairyman.¹⁵

The massive influx of slaves into towns was reflected in their low prices relative to other goods. Prices of slaves in the Delhi market in Sultan Alauddin's time may be compared with those of cattle in the same price-list.¹⁶

Slaves	Price in <i>tankas</i>	Cattle	Price in <i>tankas</i>
Female slave for domestic work ¹⁷	5 to 12	Pack-bullock	4 or 5
Female slave for concubinage	20 to 40	Bullock for plough	3
Handsome boy	20 to 30	Cow for slaughter	1.5 to 2
Adult slave-worker (male)	10 to 15	Milch-cow	3 or 4
		Milch-buffalo	10 or 12
Boy for domestic work (untrained)	7 or 8	Buffalo for slaughter	5 or 6

If one leaves out slaves meant for sexual gratification, then an adult male slave had a price only a little above in range than a milch-buffalo, and a female slave-worker would in many cases have cost much less. A boy purchased for domestic work cost about a third above the price of a buffalo sold for slaughter, but carried a price substantially less than a milch-buffalo.

When Ibn Battūṭa arrived at Delhi in 1333–34, he received ten female captives 'taken from the infidels' as gifts from the wazīr. They were not much thought of since such slaves were cheap, being dirty and unused to 'civilized ways'. Since the educated slaves too were cheap, 'no one there needs to buy captives'.¹⁸ Shihābuddīn al-'Umarī (d.1348) received reports from India of the extreme plenitude of slaves and their low prices, and of the high quality of educated and accomplished slave-girls for concubinage that one could cheaply buy. The price of an ordinary female slave for service at Delhi did not exceed 8 tankas, which was thus well within the range set by Baranī for 'Alāuddīn Khaljī's time'.¹⁹

Such plenitude and cheapness of slaves meant that even the less financially favoured could keep slaves. Nūr Turk, a noted Sufi of the time of Sultan Raziya (1236–40) had no other means of income (he did not accept gifts) than the earnings of his slave who worked as a cotton-carder.²⁰ Shaikh Nizāmuddīn recalled how his teacher 'Alāuddīn Uṣūlī had one maidservant who was a slave.²¹ Nizāmuddīn (d.1325) himself, while a youth, lived with his mother at Badaun in great poverty, and yet they had a female slave who could share the work of spinning with his mother.²² Female slaves were also occupied in hand-milling grain, a common domestic occupation for women in India.²³

Much work in crafts and commerce was carried on by slaves. Nizāmuddīn's grandfather, Khwāja 'Arab, a big merchant at Badaun in the thirteenth century, had 'numerous slaves: some of his slaves worked at crafts, others traded with goods'.²⁴ Nizāmuddīn's disciple Shaikh Naṣīruddīn's father at Awadh (Ayodhya) had many 'slaves and conducted trade in wool'.²⁵ Slaves were also employed in agriculture: Ibn Battūṭa tells us how one religious divine, Shaikh Shihābuddīn, put his slaves to the task of cultivating the land that he irrigated through water drawn from the river Yamuna near Delhi.²⁶

The number of slaves possessed by the nobles and the sultan, both in their harems and outside was naturally enormous. Sultan 'Alāuddīn Khaljī is said to have assembled 50,000 slaves in his establishments; but Sultan Firoz Tughluq (1351–88) had as many as 180,000,

of whom 12,000 worked at crafts.²⁷ His principal minister Khān Jahān had reputedly 2,000 concubines in his harem.²⁸

We know little of the lives of the ordinary slaves of the times. Enslavement must itself have been a traumatic experience. We have seen how in Chaulukya Gujarat it meant the total loss of caste and all connection with the family; in the sultanate it meant a change of religion, which naturally meant a loss of caste, but not necessarily of links with the original family. Hasan Sijzi recorded in 1317 the appearance before Shaikh Nizāmuddīn of a slave who had become the saint's disciple, and who brought his brother, a Hindu, in the hope that he would by his blessings be converted to Islam.²⁹ Clearly, the ties with his brother had continued even after enslavement. How a yearning to return to one's family was natural is brought out in the story twice told by Nizāmuddīn of his teacher 'Alāuddīn Uṣūlī's female slave, old in years, but newly enslaved in the rebel territory (*mawās*) near Badaun; she wept while remembering her son, and her humane master himself took her to a place on the edge of the *mawās*, from where she could reach home.³⁰ The story had a moral message too. In the eyes of orthodox theology 'Alāuddīn Uṣūlī had committed a grave sin since the slave, converted to Islam, would now return to her original faith, and this was apostasy. Yet, said Nizāmuddīn, 'though the superficial theologians would deny the merit of the deed [of 'Alāuddīn], one can understand [the true worth of] what he did'.³¹ The narrator of this report himself, the famous poet Hasan Sijzī, faced the same dilemma when he bought a slave-girl in Devagiri in 1318 from his own servant in order to restore her to her Hindu parents, and sought Shaikh Nizāmuddīn's approval for his act.³² However, such rescues or escapes were not possible for the bulk of the slaves, whose manumission often took place long after they had become Muslims and had accepted their new status. When Sijzī manumitted his slave Malih in 1308, taking him to Shaikh Nizāmuddīn to be accepted as his disciple,³³ Malih remained with him as his servant.³⁴

While both theologians and Sufis approved of such manumissions as meritorious and charitable acts, there was no sympathy with slaves who tried to escape from their bondage. Shaikh Nizāmuddīn related how any master whose slave had escaped used to go to Shaikh Maḥmūd Moīna-doz, who would then be quiet a while before informing the master that his slave would be caught.³⁵ His disciple Naṣīruddīn told a similar story about Shaikh Nizāmuddīn who assured a pious merchant his slave would be found.³⁶ It is obvious from the details of the latter story that the administration took the flight of a slave as a serious enough matter and considered his restoration to the master an important duty imposed on it.

It has been said above that elite-slavery needs to be considered separately from ordinary slavery, although technically the same provisions of the *sharia* applied to both. The slaves, who in the thirteenth century were mainly of Turkish origin, formed the higher ranks of the nobility, and all the sultans between 1206 and 1290 were either such slaves themselves or their descendants.³⁷ Under the Khaljīs and Tughluqs, the importance gained by Indian slaves, such as Khusrāu Khān, who fleetingly became sultan (1320), and Khan Jahān Maqbūl Telangī, who became Fīroz Shah's principal minister, indicated that Turks alone no longer remained the main source of elite-slaves. Malik Kāfūr, 'Alāuddīn Khaljī's chief noble (*malik nāib*) was perhaps the last important slave-officer of foreign origin; and 'Alāuddīn had another slave-officer among his generals of the same name (Kāfūr), who was of Maratha origin.³⁸ As a group, however, slaves no longer enjoyed the position they had earlier held in the sultanate ruling class; and the role that Fīroz Tughluq's slaves played in the struggle between rivals for the throne after his death (1388) was a short and passing phase. They were never to acquire such power again.³⁹

III

There appear to be some indications that slaves, as a portion of the population, tended to decline in relative numbers from about the latter half of the fourteenth century. There is evidence in the letters of 'Ainul Mulk Mahru, governor of Multan, under Firoz Tughluq, that there were now restrictions imposed on merchants taking slaves from India to Khurasan,⁴⁰ which one would expect to be natural if there was a fall in the supply of slaves in the local markets. Timur's large seizures of people in Delhi and on the route of his march during his devastating expedition of 1398–99, did not, of course, affect the slave population in India since it was mainly the free people (including all inhabitants of the city of Delhi that had capitulated) who were taken captive and marched off to Central Asia.⁴¹ Slaves continued to be an important item of export to Kabul, as Babur notes, when he describes Kabul immediately after his capture of it in 1504. Although 10,000 to 20,000 trading families were involved in bringing caravans from India, it cannot be said in what numbers the slaves themselves were actually exported.⁴²

Elsewhere, Babur seems to indicate a decline in the significance of slaves in India, though by implication rather than by explicit statement. In his account of India he says, 'Another pleasant thing is that it has a limitless and numberless men of every art and craft'; he repeats a little further on that 'India has limitless and infinite number of men for every craft and every work'.⁴³ One would have expected that he would be speaking of the plenitude of slaves also, but neither here where it would have been natural for him to say so, nor anywhere does a statement of this sort occur. Indeed, slaves are not mentioned at all in his account of India. It is surely a reasonable inference that he made no mention of them because the plenitude of slaves was no longer a marked feature of Indian society.

The inference is supported by an observation by Badā'uni some six decades later. Writing in 1591 he quotes a common saying that Muslims sin more than others in selling freeborn persons into slavery. He admits that this practice was common in India earlier, but remarks that it 'has these days abated somewhat'.⁴⁴ There is the curious controversy that he describes as having taken place when Mahmūd Sharqī, ruler of Jaunpur (1440–57) held a concourse of theologians to determine whether it was lawful to enslave non-Muslim inhabitants of villages in a rebel territory, a matter on which there would have been no doubts expressed a century or two earlier. Stranger still was the fact that two influential theologians argued that such enslavement was unlawful.⁴⁵ Was the practice coming into question because it was becoming so much rarer?

A number of steps taken by Akbar (1556–1605) must also have had some effect on the scale of enslavement and slave trade. He issued an order in 1562–63 that women and children should not be enslaved when troops raided rebel or defiant villages.⁴⁶ Though Abul Fazl does not say so, it is clear from two other sources that the same order also contained a prohibition of slave trade. 'Arif Qandahārī tells us that Akbar had prohibited the enslavement of 'men and women, old and young', as well as the sale and purchase of 'female slaves [for concubinage] and male slaves'.⁴⁷ Rafī'uddīn Shīrāzī adds circumstantial spice to it by saying that when he was departing from Agra to Gujarat (c. 1563–64), a companion of his, who had sold a slave, was hauled up by the kotwal of the city, who cut his ear and nailed it to the city gate, so as 'to serve as a warning to other people, the sale of male and female slaves having been banned'.⁴⁸ According to Badā'uni, orders prohibiting slave trade 'without permission' were again issued in 1594, when it was also laid down that if parents sold their children in times of distress, they should be held entitled to them [have

freed whenever they had the money to repay the amount.⁴⁹ In the *Ā'in-i Akbarī* too, the kotwal is enjoined 'not to permit enslaving and slave-selling'.⁵⁰

In conformity with his growing distaste for slavery as an institution, Akbar ordered in 1582 that all his male slaves (*ghulamān*), 'whose numbers exceeded hundreds and thousands' stood freed, since 'to consider those whom I have brought by force as my slaves amounts to stepping out of the world of justice and the realm of propriety'. His freed slaves were now to be called *chela* (Hindi for disciple) and given the option to go wherever they wished or remain in his service with pay.⁵¹

Akbar's measures undoubtedly were more than mere grandiose proclamations. The order prohibiting slave dealing implied, in the very least, that slave markets, a feature of fourteenth-century Delhi, could no longer be openly conducted. Nor, indeed, are such described with reference to any city in the Mughal empire by the numerous foreign travellers who visited India in Akbar's time and subsequently.⁵² But private transactions continued.

One may refer here to one of Akbar's own close counsellors Ḥakīm Abul Fath's letters. Accompanying Akbar on his march to Kabul in 1581, he informs his younger brother Ḥakīm Humām, who had arrived at Fatehpur Sikri, that he had previously obtained one *dāh* (girl fit for concubinage) from Qamar Khan Badakhshī and had another bought for him by Khwāja Murād. Both being at Fatehpur Sikri, Humām was to choose one for himself, or take both, since 'his being yet son-less could not be borne'.⁵³ Some six months later Abul Fath writes again from the imperial camp to his friend Ḥajī Sūfī at Fatehpur Sikri 'to search and enquire in that vicinity and obtain two handsome *dāhs* and two trained [*pukhta*] slave-boys'. No excuse, he says, was to be heard, so that clearly it was not a case of just going to the market and carrying out an errand, as apparently was the case with the purchase of three elephants from the same city, also ordered by Abu'l Fath.⁵⁴

A barbaric practice still prevailed in Bengal where it had become well established in the thirteenth century. Marco Polo tells us of the 'Idolaters' of 'Bangala' among whom eunuchs were made for all the 'Barons' of India, for whom they were carried from there; some of them were also carried by merchants 'for sale about the world'.⁵⁵ Abul Fazl describes the three forms of castration practised in Bengal with clinical coolness, and notes that the practice was prevalent in the sarkārs of Ghorāghāt and Sylhet and in Orissa.⁵⁶ Apparently, under Akbar no steps were taken to suppress the practice: Bengal, in any case, had remained only half-conquered by his death. His successor, Jahāngīr (1605–27) describing this as an old practice, which ought to have been banned by his precursors, issued orders in 1608 for its total suppression and for a ban as well on the trade in child eunuchs. Two years later he awarded life imprisonment to some persons sent to him who had committed the offence in Bihar.⁵⁷ Yet in 1613 he himself accepted the gift of fifty eunuchs that were among the presents sent to him by the governor of Bengal.⁵⁸ Despite this lapse, his severe condemnation of the practice still stands to Jahāngīr's credit; and his orders probably helped at least partly to eradicate the practice, since we hear of it no more in subsequent reports from Bengal.⁵⁹

IV

It would, perhaps, be best now to survey the evidence about slavery in India in the seventeenth and the earlier half of the eighteenth centuries, though some later evidence would need to be used to make the description fuller.

- Thurston, 1896; all repr. Delhi, 1972) s.v. *Saussurea lappa*. According to Watt, the plant grows in Kashmir and on the neighbouring mountains. Theophrastos came to know about the plant probably from Alexander's companions who had noticed it in India.
112. According to Aristoboulos (F.23= Arrianos, *Anabasis* III, 28, 6f. Also in Strabon XV, 2, 10), silphium and a kind of terebinth were the only plants commonly growing in the part of the Hindukush crossed by Alexander.
 113. *Ibid.* and Theophras., *Hist. Pl.* IV, 4, 7. It is the tree *Pistacia terebinthus*.
 114. Herod. III, 98.
 115. Ktes. F 1b (17,5); F.45 (14) and F.45c.
 116. Theoph., *Hist. Pl.* IV, 11, 13.
 117. Theoph., *Hist. Pl.* IX, 7, 2, and *De Odoribus*, 33. Hort in Leob edn. of Theophrastus.
 118. Herod., VII, 65.
 119. Nearchos, F.11 (Arrianos, *Ind.* XVI); Plutarch, *Sayings of Kings*, 181, B.
 120. Arrianos, *Anab.* IV, 26,4 and 6, 10f.
 121. Skylax, Jac. No. F.4 (Athen., II, 82).
 122. Aristob., F.19 (Strabon, XI, 72).
 123. Theoph., *Hist. Pl.* IX, 1, 2; *Hist. Pl.* IV, 4, 12.
 124. Arthur Hort's note in his Theophrastus (*Hist. Plant*) IX, 1, 2 (Leob edn.) text.
 125. Theophrastus, *Hist. Pl.* IV, 4, 6. Ebony and its characteristics are further briefly mentioned in the *Hist. Pl.* I. 5, 4f; I, 6, 1; V3, 1f; V, 4, 2 and IX 20, 4.
 126. Hugo Bretzl., *op. cit.*, p. 206.
 127. Onesik., F.22 (Strabon, XV, 1, 21). Also see Aristob., F.36 (Strabon, XV, 1, 21); Nearchos, F.6 (Arrianos' *Indika* XI, 7).
 128. Theoph., *Hist. Pl.*, 1, 7, 3 and IV, 4, 4. Also briefly referred to in the *Cause Pl.* II, 10, 2.
 129. K. Karttunen, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
 130. Meg. Jacoby, No. 715, F.4 (Diod. Sic., II, 40.4); F.19a (Arr., *Ind* XI, 9), F. 19b (Strabo, XV, 1, 40).
 131. According to *Abhidharmakosavyākhyā*, kings while destroying the soldiers, was respecting the field labourer, who was common help of both the armies. See *Camb. Hist of India*, I, p.33; *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. I, p. 369.
 132. Manu, VII, 91–93; Gautama, X, 18; Baudhāyana, I, 18, 11; Āpastamba, II, 10, 11; Yājñ., 1, 325.
 133. Manu VII 90; Baudhāyana, 1, 18, 10; Yājñā., 1, 323.
 134. The Books 12, 13 and 14 of the *Arthaśāstra* are mainly devoted to the trickeries, stratagems, etc. All sorts of foul games for defeating the enemy were justified.
 135. *Arthaśāstra*, XIII, 4, 6–7.
 136. A.L. Basham, 1981, *The Wonder That Was India*, Delhi, pp. 126–28.
 137. Manu (IX, 44) at one place says. "Land belongs to him who clears off the timber. In a *Jātaka* story a king tells his mistress that he cannot give her his kingdom. for he is not its owner. When a legendary king, Viśvakarman Bhauvana, gave land to the priests, the goddess of earth rose up in person and rebuked him, saying that he had no right to give her away. A medieval commentator, probably basing his

Yet in Gujarat an official order (*parwāncha*) of 1637 carries the complaint of one Khanji, a peasant (*muzāri*) of a village in pargana Maroli near Surat, that two other peasants, Ragho and Kalvan, had seized his slave (*ghulām*) and were keeping him with them by force.⁷³ We read of a complaint in 1662 from near Indapur in Maharashtra that the slave of a village headman (*muqaddam*) had escaped four years earlier, and was now working 'by way of paid-service (*naukarī*)' with an oil-presser.⁷⁵ Agrestic servitude seems to have been stronger in Mithila in Bihar. By a deed of the year 1730, a 'Shudra' boy Dulli Das sold himself for Rs 11.5 (received by his kinsman and surety, Parali Dās) to a Brahman astrologer Kamlanaya-sharmā.⁷⁶ That such slaves in this area were likely to be employed in agriculture is shown by Buchanan's statements: in his survey of Purnea (1809–10) he says that 'Hindus of rank' got their 'small free estates' and rented farms cultivated by their slaves;⁷⁷ and in his survey of Bhagalpur (1810–11) he observes that most men slaves there were employed in agriculture.⁷⁸

There were areas outside the Mughal empire where agrestic slavery prevailed on apparently a much larger scale. The Ahom ruler of Assam, raiding Kamrup, used to take away large numbers of peasants, and distribute them among his own people to serve them as slaves. One result of the Mughal expedition into Assam in 1661–63 was that most of these slaves, Hindu and Muslim, escaped back to their homes in Kamrup to take to cultivating their own land again.⁷⁹ In south India agrestic slavery prevailed most in Kerala, but also existed in adjoining areas. A classic account of it is offered by Buchanan (1800–10). In Palghat district he estimated that the slaves numbered 16,574 out of a total population of 123,074.⁸⁰ The connection of slavery with caste (the slaves usually belonged to the lowest castes, the Poliar and Pariar) and the customs by which the slaves were inherited and sold were very specific to Kerala and the parts adjoining. Their state was naturally one of absolute misery.⁸¹

Of ordinary slaves who were to be found in the cities we have no satisfactory evidence, possibly because in the work taken from them, there was no difference between them and ordinary domestic servants. Even the fact that their conditions were necessarily worse than domestic servants is not certain. Of slaves in Surat in 1623 Pietro della Valle does draw a gloomy picture:

Of slaves there is a numerous company, and they live with nothing; their clothing is only white linnen, which though fine is bought very cheap; and their dyet for the most part is nothing but rice. . . of which they have infinite plenty and a little fish, which is found everywhere in abundance.⁸²

There is no doubt that the word 'numerous' here must be treated with some reservation. Other accounts of Surat do not give us the impression that slaves comprised a significant portion of the population. There is also practically no reference to slaves being employed in the crafts. On the other hand Muslim merchants appear to have used slaves in trade, perhaps because not being entitled to possess property on their own, they could be trusted. We have in certain Surat documents (of 1648 and earlier) the undated complaint of the daughter of a merchant, who had died in Achin, that his slave appropriated all his merchandise and claimed to have married the merchant's widow.⁸³ There is another complaint still by the widow of a factor of a merchant, Kāmran Beg, that on her husband's death, Kāmran Beg's slave had, acting on his own, immediately seized the property of the factor on behalf of his master.⁸⁴

The escape of slaves from their masters no longer occupies so common a place in the concerns of ordinary life as it did in the fourteenth century, when *Ṣūfis* prayed for the recovery of slaves. Yet the occurrence was sufficiently widespread for Shāh Jahān to issue

an order in 1637 that 'if a male or female slave runs away, or some person lures them away, and the Imperial officials recover that male or female slave, they should return [them] to the rightful owner, and not take on this account anything at all from the owner'.⁸⁵

One category of slaves remains to be discussed: women slaves treated as concubines. Their number seems to have been fairly large. In 1824 Malcolm gave this description of their condition in Malwa:

Slavery in Malwa, and adjoining provinces, is chiefly limited to females; but there is, perhaps, no part of India where there are so many slaves of this sex. The dancing girls are all purchased when young, by the Nakers, or heads of different sets or companies, who often lay out large sums in these speculations. Female children and grown-up young women are bought by all ranks. Among the Rajput chiefs these slaves are very numerous, as also in the houses of the principal Brahmins. The usage, however, descends to the lowest classes, and few merchants or cultivators are without mistresses or servants of this description.⁸⁶

Our documents allow us to see how these unfortunate women were in actual life. From one sale deed of the late seventeenth century, already mentioned one learns that a woman called Seotī had been captured in a raid on her village, and the commandant (faujdār) gave her against part of the salary due to his retainer, Ni'matullāh. The latter now sold her for Rs 40 to one Nūr Muḥammad. The woman is described as dāh, that is, slave fit for concubinage, and this explains her price, equal to about ten months' wages of an unskilled labourer at the time.⁸⁷ What could subsequently happen to such a slave is told in a story given in a document of the late years of Shāh Jahān. Dildār was the dāh of Dost Muḥammad Mughal, when he was employed at Chandpur, near Amroha. He left the place to seek employment in the army, letting the dāh live in his house. When there came no news from him and the dāh was penniless, she went successively to the houses of three persons (two Sayyids and one Shaikh, all named), and ultimately to that of Malik Shāh Muḥammad, where she became pregnant. She was then married to the slave of the qāzī of Nagina, and the qāzī certified it. But once the qāzī was dead, her status as a married woman was contested by some people for reasons that are not clear.⁸⁸

The dāh was naturally a threat to the stability of married life, and in the seventeenth-century marriage contracts a condition was often laid down that the husband would not take a concubine, and if he did, the wife would have the right to sell her or expel her.⁸⁹ There were the rarer happier endings too, such as when a female slave Sandal was freed by her mistress Maryam Jī, after taking 30 *mahmudis* (Rs 12) from her. This happened at Surat in 1623; it is not, however, clear how Sandal came to have the amount which set her free.⁹⁰

There is no doubt that the harems of the emperor, princes, and nobility had large establishments of concubines, female slaves, eunuchs, and other male slaves. Akbar's own household had as many as 5,000 women inmates.⁹¹ These included wives of the emperor (numbering 300 according to Monserrate),⁹² women members of the imperial family, and concubines, but the bulk must have consisted of ordinary female slaves. Pelsaert, who gives a vivid description of the establishments of nobles, tells us that each noble had usually three or four wives, each of whom had ten to 100 (female) slaves, 'according to her fortune'. In addition, there were two or three eunuchs, 'purchased Bengali slaves', who were appointed for each wife.⁹³ We may then think of a noble having an establishment of anything from 30 to 400 female slaves and up to a dozen eunuchs.

There were also a number of elite-slaves, though the slave component in the Mughal nobility was not significant. Manucci tells us (c.1700) that the Mughal emperor had as many as 7000 '[male] slaves of different nations' of whom 3000 were horsemen and 4000

infantry—'all gentlemen troopers' with good pay.⁹⁴ Nobles similarly had slave-soldiers drawn from various sources. We are lucky to have the autobiography of one such slave, Tahmas Khan. He was born c.1739–40, possibly in a Georgian or Kurd community, but, falling into the hands of Uzbek soldiery as a child, he was brought up as a Turk. Presented to Mu'inul Mulk, governor of Lahore, in 1748, he became a member of his special slave corps. There was much insistence by Mu'inul Mulk that his Turkish slaves should preserve their speech and manners. Tahmas himself rose naturally from soldier to officer, and in due course was manumitted by Mu'inul Mulk's widow, who married him to a female slave of hers.⁹⁵ The conditions of life of such favoured slaves must, of course, be considered totally apart from those of the ordinary mass of slaves.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Dev Raj Chandra, *Slavery in Ancient India, as Depicted in Pali and Sanskrit Texts* (New Delhi: 1960).
- 2 G. Buhler (tr.), *The Laws of Manu* (Oxford: 1886), Vol. IV, sections 168, 185; vol. IX, sections 53–54, 179, 415, 416–17.
- 3 R.S. Sharma, *Sudras in Ancient India* (Delhi: 1958), pp.227–30. Sharma yet holds that there was a 'general weakening of slavery in the Gupta period' (p. 230).
- 4 For a translation, with commentary, of all the four documents, Pushpa Prasad, 'Female Slavery in Thirteenth-Century Gujarat: Documents in the *Lekhapaddhati*', *Indian Historical Review*, vol. XV, nos. 1–2, 1988–89, pp. 269–75. In certain quotations Prasad's translation has been slightly modified, but there is no change of sense.
- 5 Ibid., p. 269 and n.
- 6 For slavery in Islam, Reuben Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam* (Cambridge: 1957, pp. 73–89.
- 7 Abdul Qadir Badauni, *Najat ur-Rashid* (edited by S. Moinul Haque) (Lahore: 1972).
- 8 I have borrowed this term from Shadab Bano and accept the connotation she assigns to it. Shadab Bano, 'The Acquisition and Trade in Elite-Slaves in the Thirteenth Century', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, LIX Session, 1998, pp. 229–36.
- 9 Cf. Mohammad Habib, Introduction to Aligarh edition of Elliot and Dowson's *History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. II, (Aligarh: 1952), pp. 90–4.
- 10 Hasan Nizami, *Taj ul-Ma'asir*, transcript of the Asafiya Library MS in the Department of History Library, Aligarh, pp. 424, 459.
- 11 Minhāj Sirāj, *Tabaqāt-i Nāsiri* (edited by 'Abdul Hai Habibi) (Kabul: 1963 and 1964), vol. II, p. 65.
- 12 Zivā Barani, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhi* edited by Saïvid Ahmad Khan, W.N. Lees and Kabir al-Din) (Calcutta: 1860–62), p. 327.
- 13 Ibid., p. 57.
- 14 Hasan 'Ali Sijzi, *Fawā'id Lal-Fuad ul-Fawād* (edited by M. Latif Malik) (Lahore: 1966), pp. 278–9, 339–40.
- 15 Hamid Qalandar, *Khair ul-Majālis* (edited by K.A. Nizami) (Aligarh: 1959), p. 236.
- 16 Barani, *Tārīkh-i Fīroz Shāhi*, pp. 314–15.
- 17 The price quoted by Barani for Delhi was not unreasonable since we know from another source that a child-slave at Devgiri was purchased for 5 tankas in 1318, and her parents desired to redeem her for 10 tankas: Sijzi, *Fawā'id ul-Fawād*, p. 339.
- 18 H.A.R. Gibb (tr.), *The Travels of Ibn Battuta* (New Delhi: 1993 [reprint]), vol. III, p. 741.
- 19 I.H. Siddiqi and Q.M. Ahmad (tr.), *A Fourteenth-Century Arab Account of India under Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq* [*Masālik al-Absār*] (Aligarh: 1972), pp. 51–2.
- 20 Sijzi, *Fawā'id ul-Fawād*, pp. 334–5.
- 21 Ibid., pp. 278–9, 340.
- 22 Qalandar, *Khair ul-Majālis*, p. 191.
- 23 Sijzi, *Fawā'id ul-Fawād*, p. 253.
- 24 Amir Khwurd, *Siyar ul-Auliya* (edited by Chiranji Lal) (Delhi: 1302–1885), p. 94.
- 25 Ibid., p. 238.
- 26 Gibb, *Travels of Ibn Battuta*, vol. III, p. 698.
- 27 Shams Sirāj 'Atif, *Tārīkh-i Fīrozshāhi* (edited by Vilayat Husain) (Calcutta: 1888–91), pp. 267–73.

- 28 Ibid., pp. 373–400; also pp. 288–9.
- 29 Hasan Sijzi, *Fawaid ul-Fawaid*, pp. 305–6.
- 30 Ibid., pp. 278–9, 346.
- 31 Ibid., p. 279.
- 32 Ibid., p. 339.
- 33 Ibid., p. 5.
- 34 Ibid., p. 339; in a conversation in 1318 Hasan Sijzi refers to him as 'my manumitted servant'.
- 35 Ibid., pp. 425–6.
- 36 Qalandar, *Khawar ul-Maqalat*, p. 184.
- 37 For a study of the sultanate ruling class in the thirteenth century, see Irfan Habib in *Medieval India: I* (New Delhi: 1969, pp. 1–21).
- 38 'Kāfir-i Marhat-nāznad' appears among commanders sent against Kubak, the Mongol ruler, in Isami, *Futūh us-Salāfin* (edited by A.S. Usha) (Madras: 1948), p. 319.
- 39 Cf. Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (Cambridge: 1979), pp. 305–8.
- 40 'Ainul Mulk Mahru, *Inshā'ī Mahru* (edited by Ahmad Razvi) (Lahore: 1965), p. 213.
- 41 Sharfuddin 'Alī Yazdī, *Zafarnāma* (edited by Muhammad Ihsan) (Calcutta: 1898), vol. II, pp. 14–17, 47–182; Yahyā Sarhindi, *Tarikh-i Mubārak Shāhī* (edited by M. Hidayat Husain, Calcutta, 1931), pp. 162–7.
- 42 *Bāburnāma* (Turki) (edited by Eiji Mano) (Kyoto: 1965), pp. 199–200, English translation by A.S. Beveridge (London: 1921), vol. I, p. 202.
- 43 *Bāburnāma*, ibid., p. 469; Beveridge, ibid., vol. II, p. 329.
- 44 Badaūni, *Niyāt ur-Rashad*, pp. 239–40. Badaūni (*Muntakhab ut-Tawārikh* [edited by Ali Ahmad and Lees, (Calcutta: 1864–69) vol. III, pp. 66–69] recalls how Miran Haum Sambali had expressed dissatisfaction with certain theologians for endorsing a fatwā legitimizing the sale of freeborn children to parents in distress. This incident took place in the shadow of the 1556 famine at Agra.
- 45 Ibid., p. 240. Badaūni, who claims to have read the literature, professes preference for the view that such enslavement was permissible. This was also the view taken by the concourse of theologians at the Sharqi court.
- 46 Abul Fazl, *Akbarnāma* (edited by Agha Jamal Ali and Jafar Khan) (Calcutta: 1873–77), vol. III, pp. 116–20.
- 47 Asif Qandahari, *Tarikh-i Akbari* (edited by M. Mumtaz Ali, Akbar Ali Durrani, and Imtiaz Ali Arshi) (Rampur: 1962), p. 39.
- 48 Rafi'uddin Ibrahim Shirāzi, *Ta'kirat ul-Mulūk*, British Library MS Add. 2383, pp. 231b–232a. Shirāzi adds further spice by telling us that Akbar's orders were issued at the instance of a Brahman mistress of his, who told him that his empire was losing 2,00,000 people a year as a result of the slave trade!
- 49 Badaūni, *Muntakhab ut-Tawārikh*, vol. II, pp. 390–1.
- 50 Abul Fazl, *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, (edited by H. Blochmann) (Calcutta: 1867–77), vol. I, p. 264.
- 51 This declaration was made in a council convened to consider measures of public welfare. The text of these deliberations, used here, is from the earlier version of the *Akbarnāma*, British Library MS Add. 27,247 p. 327b. The corresponding passage is to be found in *Akbarnāma* (printed text), vol. III, pp. 379–80.
- 52 However, Manrique refers to 'markets and fairs' where villagers seized for non-payment of tax were sold: Fray Sebastian Manrique, *Travels, 1629–43* (translated by C.E. Luard and H. Hosten) (London: 1927), vol. II, p. 272.
- 53 Abul Fateh, *Ruq'at-i Abul Fateh Gīlānī* (edited by M. Bashir Husain) (Lahore: 1968), p. 22.
- 54 Ibid., pp. 46–7.
- 55 Henry Yule and Henri Cordier, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo* (New Delhi: 1993 [reprint of 3rd edition]), vol. II, p. 115.
- 56 *Al-Siyar al-Dawla*, vol. I, pp. 780–81. For a mention of the practice in Shiraz, see Ahmad Razvi, *Ā'in-i Akbarī* (edited by Ross, Harley and Haqq) (Calcutta: 1918–39), p. 96.
- 57 Jahāngir, *Tuzuk-i Jahāngirī* (edited by Saiyid Ahmad) (Ghazipur and Aligarh: 1863–4, pp. 71–2, 81.
- 58 Ibid., p. 120.
- 59 Except in instances that concern the law, the emperor in the *Al-Siyar al-Dawla* as in *Al-Siyar al-Dawla*'s account of Bengal and Orissa, *Khulāsat ut-Tawārikh* (edited by Zafar Hasan) (Delhi: 1916), pp. 47–8, 50.
- 60 Francisco Pelsaert, 'Remonstrantie' (translated by W.H. Moreland and P. Gevli) in *Jahāngir's India* (Cambridge: 1925), p. 47.
- 61 Manrique, *Travels*, vol. II, p. 272. Cf. Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, 1656–68* (translated by A. Constable, 2nd edition revised by V.A. Smith) (London: 1916), p. 205.
- 62 Peter Mundy, *Travels*, vol. II (edited by R.C. Temple) (London: 1914), vol. II, pp. 73–4.

- 63 Munhsī Nand Rām Kāvasth Shrivāstava, *Siyāqnāma* (1694–96), lithographed, Lucknow, 1879, p. 88.
- 64 Shihābuddin Tālīsh, *Fathiyā-i 'Ibriyā* or *Tārīkh-i Mulk-i Āshām* (Calcutta: 1847), pp. 52–4.
- 65 Caesar Frederick (Caesar de Frederici), 'Extracts of his Eighteen Years Indian Observations', in *Purchas his Pilgrimes* (Glasgow: 1905 [reprint]), vol. X, pp. 88–143.
- 66 Du Jarric, *Akbar and the Jesuits* (translated by C.H. Payne) (London: 1926), pp. 77–8. The report was based on letters from Fr J. Xavier.
- 67 Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India* (New Delhi: 1999 [2nd edition]) pp. 116–17 (authorities for the famine are cited).
- 68 Abdul Hamid Lahori, *Pādshāhnāma* (edited by Kabir al-Din Ahmad, Abd al-Rahim and W.N. Lees) (Calcutta: 1866–72), vol. II, p. 489. The emperor (Shāh Jahān) ordered that children so sold be bought back and restored to their parents. One does not know how far, if at all, this well-intentioned order was backed by the sanction of an adequate amount of expenditure.
- 69 John Marshall in *India: Notes and Observations in Bengal, 1668–72* (edited by S.A. Khan) (London: 1927), pp. 125–6, 137.
- 70 W. Foster (ed.), *The English Factories in India, 1668–69* (London: 1927), p. 311.
- 71 Donald Butter, *Outlines of the Topography and Statistics of the Southern Districts of Oud'h* (Calcutta: 1839), p. 157.
- 72 F.R. Burton, 'Notes Relative to the Population of Sind', (31 December 1847) (edited by R. Hughes Thomas, *Memoirs on Shikarpoor* Bombay: 1855), p. 646.
- 73 John Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India, Including Malwa and Adjoining Provinces* (London: 1824 [2nd edition]), vol. II, p. 202.
- 74 Collection of documents from Surat, etc., 1583–1648, MS in Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, Blochet: Supl. Pers. 482, f.165a.
- 75 *Selected Waqa'i of the Deccan (1660–1671)* (edited by Y.H. Khan) (Hyderabad: 1953) p. 95.
- 76 D.C. Sircar, *Studies in the Society and Administration of Ancient and Medieval India* (Calcutta: 1967), vol. I, pp. 227–9.
- 77 Francis Buchanan, *An Account of the District of Purnea in 1809–10* (Patna: 1928), p. 162.
- 78 Ibid., *An Account of the District of Bhagalpur in 1810–11* (Patna: n.d., p. 193).
- 79 Tālīsh, *Fathiyā-i 'Ibriyā*, pp. 52–4. For a very brief reference to this event, Muḥammad Kāzīm, 'Ālamgīrnāma' (edited by Khadim Husain and Abdul Hai) (Calcutta: 1865–73), p. 712. It is worth noting that in 1658 the ruler of Koch Bihar raided Ghoraghat to carry away large numbers of peasants, but whether his purpose was to settle them by force in his own territory or use them as slaves is not made clear, 'Ālamgīrnāma, p. 677.
- 80 Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar, &c.* (London: 1807), vol. II, pp. 361–2.
- 81 Buchanan, *Journey from Madras*, vol. II, pp. 370–72, 491–9, 562; vol. III, pp. 36–7, 140, 226–7, 281.
- 82 *The Travels of Pietro della Valle in India* (translated by Edward Grey) (London: 1892), vol. I, p. 42.
- 83 MS Collection of Surat Documents, Blochet Supl. Pers. 482, pp. 226a–7a.
- 84 Ibid., pp. 185a–6b.
- 85 Ibid., p. 53a. By a slip 'Ali Muhammad Khān (*Mir'āt-i Aḥmadī* (edited by Nawab Ali) (Baroda: 1927–8, 1930), vol. I, p. 251 attributes this order to Aurangzeb and puts it within the account of AH 1069/1658–59.
- 86 Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India*, vol. II, p. 199.
- 87 Shrivāstava, *Siyāqnāma*, p. 188.
- 88 Original mahẓar in the Department of History Library, Aligarh: Amroha Collection, II, no. 11. Malik Shah Muhammad did not think that the mention of his name in connection with the dāh's stay in his house brought any indignity on him; he is a signatory of this document!
- 89 *Siyāqnāma*, pp. 88–9. Blochet Supl. Pers. 482, pp. 217a–b; Shireen Moosvi, 'Travails of a Mercantile Community', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, LII Session 1991–92, pp. 402, 404–5. Shadab Bano, 'Marriage and Concubinage in the Mughal Imperial Family', *ibid.*, LX Session 1999, p. 357.
- 90 Blochet Supl. 482, p. 194a–b. It is also not certain that Sandal was a dāh; the more general word for female slave, *kanīzak*, is used for her.
- 91 *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, vol. I, p. 40.
- 92 Fr. A. Monserrate, *Commentary on his Journey to the Court of Akbar*, transl. J.S. Hoyland, annotated by S.N. Banerjee (Cuttack: 1922), p. 202.
- 93 Pelsaert, *Jahangir's India*, pp. 64–5.
- 94 Nicolao Manucci, *Storia do Mogor, 1656–1712* (translated by W. Irvine) (London: 1907–08), vol. II, pp. 357–8.
- 95 *Tahmāsnāma* (edited by Muhammad Aslam) (Lahore: 1986). There is a summary translation by P.S. Madhava Rao, *Tahmas Nama* (Bombay: 1967).

CHAPTER 27

Gender Relations in Medieval India

Indu Banga

‘As a relatively new term’, gender came into currency in historical studies in the 1980s.¹ The term ‘gender’ emphasizes relations between men and women as social entities distinct from biological categories. Thus, ‘gender history is not only about women, but also about ‘the society as a whole in which they are placed along with men’.² However, the relations of power implicit in the term gender have generally been tilted against women. Therefore, an understanding of gender relations as a framework of social organization requires focusing on the relevant social situations and processes that have a bearing on the relative position and initiative of women.

Indian historians have been reflecting on the ‘position of women’, generally as an ‘index of civilization’ for almost a century. It may, therefore, be useful to approach the problem historiographically, with special reference to K.M. Ashraf’s classic study, which is still the most comprehensive treatment of the issues involved in terms of the range of questions asked and the variety of sources tapped. The second section of the present essay looks at some of the normative statements and empirical evidence on aspects of gender relations around the time of the Turkish conquest. The third focuses upon the major new factor represented by Islam, both normatively and empirically. The broad continuities notwithstanding, some aspects under the Mughals are treated in the next section because of a quantitative difference in the available evidence and, to a certain extent, also in the state policies and the empirical situation. The fifth section takes up the bearing of devotional movements, commonly covered under ‘Bhakti’, on the relative position of women, and the sixth looks at the period as a whole in terms of continuities and shifts. The last section attempts to illumine the situation in medieval India by comparing it with medieval Europe.

I

K.M. Ashraf looked at the issue of gender relations from political, economic, and social perspectives, and in terms of community, caste, class, and regional differences. Besides

incidental references to food, dress, ornaments, amusements, artistic interests, and refinement and beauty of Indian women, Ashraf dwelt on the institutions of family, domestic slavery, harems, purdah, prostitution, *satī*, and *jauhar*. In this significant statement on the core issues, he conjured up a comprehensive picture of the position of women in relation to men in north India from the thirteenth to the early sixteenth century, with perceptive remarks on the earlier and later situations further illuminating the subject.³

In Ashraf's assessment, the institution of joint family among the Hindus ranked above 'the church and the state'. There was no individual property within the family, but the right of maintenance from the coparcenary property was extended to all male members of the family, and their wives and children. The daughter became a member of her husband's family on marriage. An adopted son renounced all his rights in his natural family. A son was always preferred to a daughter, and among sons, the eldest. The joint family gave a sense of security, but militated against the development of individuality, and the spirit of enterprise. The patriarchal idea permeated 'the whole social system' with a close and direct bearing on the position of women in the social order.⁴

The position of woman was 'distinctly subordinate': the essence of her life consisted of service of the male and dependence upon him. She was in a state of perpetual wardship in relation to her father, husband, and her eldest son. The societal laws and customs stamped her with a sort of mental deficiency. If not killed in infancy, she was given away to a husband in an indissoluble tie. If she died in pregnancy, she was believed to turn into the most dreaded of evil spirits, known as the *churail*. Self-immolation on the death of her husband was deemed to be her moral duty. The woman's position was, thus, 'most unpleasant' from her birth to her death. Religion gave her the consolation to reconcile herself to her fate, but excluded her from every position of power even within its own structure and institutions.⁵ The prevalence of patriarchal structures and values did not mean that the woman was not respected in a Hindu home. As a mother, she was marked out for special devotion. The relations of the husband with his wife were somewhat formal but tender. The wife showed her devotion in various ways. Once the personality of the woman was suppressed, all chances of disagreement between the two sexes disappeared. The children were brought up with care and love. The birth of a male child was an important event in the life of a married woman. Both boys and girls were married at an early age by their parents. Marriage was more a family affair than a personal concern of the marrying couple. The father formally gifted the daughter to her husband by a ceremony known as *kanyādan*. A large dowry was generally provided for the bride. After marriage, she did not belong to her natal family and was no more a master of herself either. She belonged to her husband and abided by his will. If married in an affluent family she was likely to have a rival wife or wives. The average male could not afford to have more than one wife, which made monogamy the rule. In the absence of a male heir, the husband could marry another woman. Like marriage, prostitution was a recognized social institution known in India from ancient times. The tradition of offering girls to the sacred places also continued in medieval times.⁶

The intellectual culture of women varied according to class. Upper-class women could take interest in arts and sciences. Dewal Rani, Rupmati, and Mira Bai presented good examples of Hindu culture among women of this class. However, there was no room for cultural growth in the rural economy. The poor class of peasant women remained too occupied with domestic and farm work, besides rearing children, to find leisure in intellectual occupations or even recreation. In Bengal women were debarred from taking part in certain processes of weaving; this restriction did not apply to domestic work.

Though even in ancient India women observed a certain veil (*ghūngat*), an elaborate and institutionalized form of purdah was a phenomenon of Muslim rule. Indeed, Ashraf maintains that purdah became a marker of the status of a woman in Hindu society. The raids of neighbouring Muslims on Hindu women were a minor factor in the spread of purdah. Generally, the Hindu nobility was quick in adopting the ways of the Muslim rulers. Among upper-class Hindus purdah signified spotless moral character and sustained a reputation for chastity. The vast mass of the peasant women did not wear any special veil and did not live in seclusion.⁷

The custom of becoming *sati* was confined to the upper classes among Hindus, favoured especially by the Rajputs. The women of the lower classes did not even follow the biers of their husbands to the cremation ground. The obligation of self-immolation was not reciprocal. The primitive custom of self-immolation dated back to very ancient times, probably pre-Aryan times. *Sahamarana* or *sahagamana* referred to dying with the corpse and *anumarana* or *anugamana* referred to dying in the absence of the corpse. In the case of more wives than one, the chief wife had the privilege of being burnt with the corpse; the other wives were burnt in separate fires. In exceptional cases, all the co-wives could sink their differences and mutual ill-will to be burnt together with the corpse in the same fire. The Brahman priests played a crucial role in the whole process, from persuasion to become a *sati* to the actual burning. The woman was assured of joining her husband for all eternity with him, enjoying riches, apparel, honour, and happiness. This relic of a primitive age and of a barbarous past, according to Ashraf, was regarded by many as 'the last proof of perfect unity in body and soul between a Hindu wife and her husband'. The failure of a widow to burn herself with her deceased husband was regarded as 'a sure index of want of fidelity and truthfulness on her part'. However, the ground situation varied from *sati* to *sati*. Abul Fazl is quoted here to suggest that some women were compelled by their relatives to burn themselves; some accepted the ordeal deliberately and with a cheerful countenance due to their devotion for their dead husbands; some surrendered themselves out of regard for public opinion; others were swayed by considerations of family traditions and customs; and some were actually dragged into the fire against their will. The practice of *sati* was generally encouraged by Rajput rulers; even the Muslim rulers tried only to ensure that no compulsion or violence was used. On the whole, no general prohibition was enforced or contemplated.⁸

The custom of *jauhar* was not confined to the Rajputs, though it was more frequently observed by them. In a desperate situation they decided to fight unto death and before going into the battle they killed their women and children or locked them in an underground enclosure and set fire to the building. Two well-known examples are those of Hamir Dev of Ranthambhore and the raja of Kampila. In the case of Medini Rai of Chanderi, the men virtually committed suicide after killing all their women and children. Death was regarded as preferable to dishonour and humiliation at the hands of the victors. In the case of Puran Mal of Chanderi, Sher Shah castrated his son and turned over his daughter to professional dancers in the streets, both of whom had survived *jauhar*. Significantly, the Rajputs are said to have performed *jauhar* even in their own wars out of concern for honour.⁹

According to Ashraf, the Muslims brought with them similar notions of family honour, but a different conception of family life, with their different laws of inheritance and divorce. This did not mean, however, that there was parity between Muslim men and women. Even the Quran lays down that men are the maintainers of women and are superior to women on account of the qualities that God has gifted 'the one above the other'. In India Muslims followed the older traditions of the ancient Persians. This is reflected in

contemporary Persian literature. According to a tradition reported in the name of the great Persian poet Firdausi, the woman and the dragon were dangerous creatures fit only to be destroyed; till she found her way to the graveyard, a woman was to be strictly confined to the four walls of a house. A whole chapter in a thick volume could be devoted to the vices of the female; she was seen as mentally weak and naturally wicked. Even the wife was not to be trusted in matters of consequence; if it became unavoidable to consult her, the best course was to act contrary to her advice. The only good quality of a woman, it was said, was that she was an object of sexual gratification. An ascetic believed that women were meant for hell; they represented the power of evil, whereas men represented the power of good. Exaggerated value was placed on the chastity of women. An honest girl was expected to die rather than submit to the amours of a lover, because a girl who had any reflections cast on her chastity could never expect to find any respectable person to marry her even if the accusations were proved to be absolutely groundless.¹⁰

The sultans generally maintained a large number of wives and concubines in their harems, which included their female relations and other female persons. All the members of the royal family were subject to the commands of the reigning sultan. They had their well-guarded lodgings within the palace; all requirements of purdah were scrupulously carried out by male and female servants and slaves under a governess within and a *khwaja-sara*, the chief eunuch, outside. In the sultanate of Malwa the harem developed into a miniature government with regular armies, arts, and tradeswomen, and a great bazaar. The inmates of the harem were excluded from the view of the public. The example of the sultans was followed by members of the ruling class who had their own large or small harems. On the plea that the sharia forbade outdoor movement for women, Firoz Shah Tughluq prohibited the visit of Muslim women to mausoleums outside the city of Delhi. A respectable lady was expected to move in a closed litter (*doli*), accompanied by male attendants. Non-aristocratic women were expected to put on the *burqa*, a garment covering the whole body. Essentially, social intercourse between the sexes came to be confined to those who were *mahrums* or who were forbidden to marry one another. Living in purdah and inside the harem came to be identified with public reputation for chastity. However, some coastal towns in Gujarat were not affected by this popular custom, not to the same degree as the inland towns, presumably due to contact with foreign people through international commerce.¹¹

The Muslim royalty and aristocracy did not neglect to give their daughters an excellent education and training. Sultan Raziya could occupy the throne due to such education and training. Ashraf goes on to add that a healthier tradition came to prevail among the Indian aristocracy under the Mughals. The ladies of the royal harem of Humayun used to mix freely with their male friends and visitors. They went out sometimes in male garments, played polo, and applied themselves to music. They were well versed in the use of the pellet bow and other practical arts. Comparative freedom gave Mughal women a greater sense of their dignity and honour; mothers of the famous emperors were as great in their own sphere as their sons were in theirs. Hamida Banu expected equality of treatment from Humayun as her husband. The examples of Nur Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal are even better known.¹²

A familiar feature of Muslim homes were domestic servants. Their most important section consisted of female and male slaves. The female slaves were of two kinds: those employed for menial work, and those employed for company and pleasure. The former were often subjected to various indignities, but the latter had a more respectable position in the household. Apart from the slave-girls from within India, female slaves were

imported from China and Turkestan. They were known for their distinctive qualities. As a Mughal noble humorously put it, the Khursani woman could be employed for work, the Indian woman for nursing children, the Persian woman for the pleasure of her company, and a Transoxianian could be employed for being thrashed as a warning for the other three. Like male slaves, female slaves were regarded as the property of the master and not as free agents; he had the right over the labour and body of the female slaves. Concubinage was a recognized institution.¹³

The Muslim attitude towards sex in general is reflected in Alauddin Khalji's order about the scheduled rates for sexual services by public women and prostitutes 'whose houses had become the most favourite haunts of all soldiers and the ruin of so many youths'. Prostitution prevailed on a wide scale. The attitude of the state towards public prostitution was never influenced by moral or religious considerations. No attempt was made to prohibit or abolish the institution on ethical grounds. The administration helped in regulating the profession as a source of revenue. A special importance was attached to the deflowering of a virgin. The public women were associated with dance and music, which were important in the scheme of social pleasures, and also in the celebration of marriages and other domestic functions.¹⁴

We may appreciate the significance of K.M. Ashraf's treatment of the subject with reference to the recent monographic studies of women in medieval India. In a recent book entitled *Women in Delhi Sultanate*, the author talks of the position of women in the pre-sultanate period, of women in Islam, women in politics, of women and Sufis, women and Bhakti saints, and of women in social and cultural life.¹⁵ There is no essential connection of the chapters with one another; there is no necessary connection in the contents given in each chapter. Thus, there is a lot of isolated information, but no attempt at interpretation; there is no conceptualization of gender relations. In short, there is no advance upon K.M. Ashraf.

The women in Mughal India have received more attention from the historians than the women in the Delhi sultanate. In fact, two doctoral theses have been published. One of these concentrates on women in contemporary politics, the privileges enjoyed by the ladies of royalty, and on their social and cultural activities. The scope of this work is extremely narrow, though it provides detailed information on the highest stratum of women in the Mughal empire in terms mainly of their political influence, social and cultural activities, and life in the royal harem.¹⁶ The second work relates to Muslim women per se and provides information on customs of birth and marriage, food and dress, toilet and ornaments, education and artistic activities, games, sports, amusements and feasts, festivals and fairs, polygamy and harem life, dower, divorce, purdah, child marriage, unmatched marriages, and the position of widows. This information is interesting and useful, but the way in which it is presented does not lead to a very meaningful understanding of gender relations.¹⁷ Therefore, we have to turn to other sources, including contemporary evidence, to supplement and complement Ashraf's treatment and also modify it where necessary.

II

As a benchmark, we may begin with Alberuni who lived in north India in the early eleventh century for over a decade. He collected a large number of Sanskrit works, had discussions with Indian scholars, observed things for himself, and wrote a comprehensive work on

India around AD 1030. 'We shall now speak of certain strange manners and customs of the Hindus', says Alberuni in his *Kitāb al-Hind*, and goes on to observe, among many other things, that in all consultations and emergencies 'they take the advice of the women'.¹⁸ The idea of consulting women and taking their advice presumably was alien to Alberuni. However, the importance given to women in this context was no index of their position in the social order. The chief rule of the Hindu law of inheritance was that: 'women do not inherit, except the daughter'. But she got the fourth share of a son, and this share was spent on her till the time of her marriage and on her dowry. 'Afterwards she has no more income from the house of her father.'

The widow did not inherit any property, but the heir of her deceased husband had to provide her with nourishment and clothing as long as she lived. She had no right to marry another man. She could either remain a widow for her life or burn herself. If she did not burn herself, she was ill-treated as long as she lived.¹⁹ The wives of the kings generally burnt themselves, whether they wished it or not: the idea was to prevent any of them from committing something unworthy of the illustrious husband. An exception was made only for women of advanced years and those who had children. The son was the protector of those women who survived as widows.

Marriage was of crucial importance for women because, unlike men, they could marry only once. Girls were married at a young age, and the marriage was arranged by the parents. No gift was settled (but dowry was given). Husband and wife could only be separated by death 'as they have no divorce'. A man could have one to four wives. According to Alberuni's informers, a Brahman could take four wives, a Kshatriya three, a Vaishya two, and a Shudra only one. Nobody was allowed to marry a woman of a caste superior to his own. The child belonged to the caste of the mother, not to that of the father.²⁰ Alberuni's information on endogamy, hypergamy, *anuloma*, and *sapinda* indicates that he was relying largely on Sanskrit works like the *Smṛiti* of Manu, which he explicitly mentions at one place.

Alberuni also refers to the biological disabilities of the woman. During the time of her menstrual course she was regarded as impure and the husband was not allowed to come near her. Similarly, as long as the woman was in childbed, she did not touch any vessel and nothing was eaten in her house. The duration of impurity varied from caste to caste: eight days for the Brahman, twelve for the Kshatriya, fifteen for the Vaishya, and thirty for the Shudra. For the people reckoned outside the castes, no term was fixed.²¹

The Hindus were not very severe in punishing whoredom, observes Alberuni. The fault lay with the kings. But for them, no Brahman or priest would suffer in their idol temples the women who sing, dance, and play. The kings made them an attraction for their cities due to financial reasons: they wanted to recover the expenditure on the army by the revenues that they derived from the business of temple girls both as fines and taxes. Regarded as a safeguard against the passions of unruly men, prostitution was regulated by the state. Adultery, however, was not tolerated according to Alberuni, and an adulteress was driven out of the house of the husband and banished.²²

The *Smṛiti* authorities of the pre-Mughal centuries extensively invoke the *Manusmṛiti* and its doctrines of perpetual subjection of women to their male relations at different stages of their lives. They dwell on the husband's duty to guard his wife by keeping her engaged in household work in the interest of the family. The biological and religious disabilities of women are also mentioned. The penalties for women under the *Smṛiti* criminal law, including capital punishment for adultery and thrashing, are repeated. However, all authorities do not agree on all points, which may be a reflection of spatio-temporal differences in the norms and practices. The laws related to penances were relatively relaxed. A

woman of any one of the three upper castes who conceived due to intercourse with a Shudra paramour could not be purified and had to be abandoned, but if she conceived due to intercourse with a man of any of the upper three castes she could be purified through penance. A woman guilty of illicit relations but not conceiving could be purified through appropriate penance.²³

There appears to be some improvement in women's property rights by this time. *Strīdhana* is comprehensively defined in the *Smritis* to cover several kinds of property acquired by a woman on specific occasions and at different stages of her life: as property inherited, acquired by partition, received as gift, and obtained as treasure trove as well as the nuptial fee. Similarly dowry (*saudayika*) covers all that a girl receives either before or after marriage from her husband, father, or mother, or their families. The right of the woman to dispose of the *strīdhana* and *saudayika* in any manner she liked is reinforced. The immovable property received from the husband could only be enjoyed but not disposed of. One author concludes that the wife was entitled to the entire property of her deceased husband if it was divided from the family property in his lifetime. The widow's right to hold the property of a son-less husband was recognized, but she could not sell the property. A distinction was made between ancestral and self-acquired property. Not any wife but only the *patni*, or the devoted wife who had been married according to the provisions of *Smriti* law, was entitled to hold the property of her deceased husband.²⁴

The elaborate rules relating to marriage in the older *Smritis* are repeated at great length with occasional comments. Inter-caste marriage was forbidden among the three upper castes. Brahmins could marry women of other castes in the descending order (*anuloma*). However, sacrifices could be performed only with a wife of the same caste. The wives from the lower castes were not excluded from sexual pleasure. The *Smriti* authorities repeat the old exogamous rule forbidding marriage within the same gotra, pravara, and sapinda up to three degrees of relationship from the mother's side and five degrees from the father's. Regional differences were recognized in respect of *asura* and other similar forms of marriage, as also in the case of the ancient custom of marriage with the daughter of a maternal uncle. All rules about marriage were not of the same importance, which left the scope for reasonable compromises, especially regional variations. It continued to be obligatory for the parents and guardians to arrange the marriage of girls before puberty. The husband could be much older, even three times the age of the girl. A worthless husband was better than no husband. If a girl was not married for some years after puberty, she had the right to choose a suitable husband. A marriage could be revoked in view of certain defects in the husband, especially his sexual inability. Such a woman could marry another man. But a widow was not allowed to remarry, not in the *Kali Age*.²⁵

It was the husband's duty to maintain his wives properly, irrespective of their age, provided their behaviour was good. He could not abandon a chaste and gentle wife. The wicked wife could be abandoned, but even she had to be given maintenance. The wife's duty was to lead a life of sober dependence, with absolute devotion and loyalty to her husband. She could be superceded for her inability to produce a male child. No social intercourse was to be maintained with women polluted by rape. A woman abandoned for specified crimes was denied social intercourse as well as conjugal relations and participation in Vedic and *Smriti* rites. A woman abandoned for disease could be denied only conjugal relations. A woman guilty of unchastity was to be banished; a woman suspected of unchastity excommunicated. A woman leaving her husband in anger could return within ten days without being liable to penance, but a Brahmin woman had to be abandoned. Self-immolation was obligatory: to become a *sati* was a prerogative as well as a duty. An

exception was made for pregnant widows and widows having infant children. The authors who treat self-immolation as optional, insist on the strict observance of the vows prescribed for the widow. On the whole, however, to become a *satī* was more meritorious.²⁶

The text that continued to mould public opinion on gender relations during the medieval period was the *Mahābhārata*, mentioned by Alberuni as the most popular Sanskrit work in the early eleventh century. A scholarly analysis of the epic shows that women had rights in kinship systems, but the entire mechanisms of marriage, descent, residence, and inheritance were organized in such a way that women had little access to resources, or even to other women. Under the patriarchal order, kinship and conjugal and familial systems tended to construct women in such a way that they were less able than men to act as fully operative subjects. Taboos on the most natural physiological functions like menstruation and reproduction created a psychological world in which the woman was made to feel degraded. Organized expropriation of women's sexuality by men went a long way to define 'women'. Male right over female sexuality resulted in the branding of certain women as 'deviant' and others as '*satī*'. Women were sought to be moulded to the will and norms of the patriarchal society. An artificial dichotomy was created between 'domestic' and 'public', and the former was projected as inferior to the latter, which was regarded as the exclusive preserve of men.²⁷

Empirical evidence on gender relations during the medieval period indicates that social realities in most parts of the Indian subcontinent were not far removed from the prescribed norms. Brahmans in the south, observed Paes, were all married, and their beautiful wives were 'very retiring' and very seldom left their homes. The Vijayanagar rulers had large harems of wives and concubines, together with other women and attendants, including eunuchs and slave-girls. No man was normally allowed to see them. The royal ladies moved in closed litters, attended by eunuchs. The women employed in the harem had their houses within the palace. No male child was allowed to remain with the women after the age of ten. Women trained for singing and dancing used to entertain the king. Other women were assigned various duties. Occasionally, the queens accompanied the king to the battlefield, and more often to the temple. Many women accompanied their husbands in camps, which thus became households on the move. To be seen more in public were the courtesans, some of whom were very accomplished and very rich. Every one of them was covered with pearls and precious stones. They lived in the best streets of the city, in the best rows of houses. Respectable men could go to their houses without any blame attached to them. These women were allowed to chew betel with the wives of the king, which was a rare privilege. And, they paid taxes. Prostitution was obviously a socially recognized institution. The temple girls, known generally as *devadāsīs*, also appeared in public processions at the times of festivals, besides performing dances before the gods, and performing other duties in the temples. The most talented of them could secure royal grants for their temples, acting as courtesans. They were generally remunerated from the temple funds. Some of them were known for their literary and poetic talents or even scholarship. Culturally, the courtesans and the best of the *devadāsīs* belonged to the elite, but socially they were generally regarded as inferior to a married woman. The *devadāsīs*, deemed to be married to gods, but not chaste in their mundane life, had a peculiar position: respectable in some ways and degraded in others.²⁸

The value placed on devotion to the earthly husband was clearly visible in the practice of becoming a *satī*. Ibn Battuta reports one case from Ajodhan, the town associated with Shaikh Farid. Later on, he used 'often to see a Hindu woman richly dressed, riding on horse-back, followed by both Muslims and infidels and preceded by drums and trumpets';

she was accompanied also by Brahmans. The sultan's permission was necessary for burning a widow, but it was accorded as a matter of routine. The act was regarded as commendable by Hindus, but it was not obligatory. The woman's family acquired a certain prestige and reputation for fidelity. A widow who did not burn herself dressed in coarse garments and lived with her own people in misery, 'despised for her lack of fidelity'. But she was not forced to burn herself.²⁹ Near Dhar in central India, Ibn Battuta saw three women whose husbands had been killed in battle. 'Each one had a horse brought to her and mounted it, richly dressed and perfumed. In her right hand she held a coconut, with which she played, and in her left hand a mirror, in which she looked at her face.' They were surrounded by Brahmans and their own relatives, preceded by drums, trumpets, and bugles. Through these women, people sent their messages to their near ones in the other world. Reaching the place of cremation, they plunged into the pool and divested themselves of their clothes and ornaments, which they distributed as alms. They were given unsewn garments of coarse cotton to cover themselves. Fires were lit in a low-lying spot, and there were about twenty-five men with pieces of wood. Drummers and trumpeters awaited the arrival of these women. The moment one of them cast herself into the fire, the drums, trumpets, and bugles were sounded, and the men threw their firewood on her and others put heavier wood on top of her to prevent her moving. Cries were raised and there was a loud clamour. Ibn Battuta was about to faint when his companions brought water and laved his face. After this he withdrew. He makes his disapproval of the act quite explicit by his remark on the place: it looked like 'a spot in hell—God preserve us from it!'³⁰ The greatest Persian poet of India of the times, Amir Khusrau, on the other hand, praises 'a woman dying willingly for her dead husband'. It was forbidden in Islam 'but behold what a noble thing it is. If the law permitted it, many a blessed one would die eagerly like that'. Significantly, Amir Khusrau brackets the devotion of a woman to her husband with the devotion of a man to his idol or master.³¹

The chief characteristic of the practice of becoming *satī* was its expiating quality, observes James Tod. 'By this act of *faith*, the *Satī* not only makes atonement for the sins of her husband, and secures the remission of her own but has the joyful assurance of reunion to the object whose beatitude she procures.' Other factors could be added to the religious doctrine that enabled even the timid female of Bengal to lay her head on the pyre 'with the most philosophical composure'. Closely linked with the practice of *satī* was the 'more awful rite' of *jauhar*, which was performed not only in war against the Turks, but in the internal wars of the Rajputs. The fear of being enslaved and dishonoured was the motivating force. To prevent such degradation, the brave Rajput had recourse to *jauhar*, which involved immolation of every female of the family: the women themselves embraced such 'a refuge from pollution'. The very term widow was used as one of reproach.³²

Tod's comment on the associated practice of female infanticide is more severe. 'Although custom sanctions, and religion rewards a *Satī*, the victim to marital selfishness, yet, to the honour of humanity, neither traditional adage nor religious text can be quoted in support of practice so revolting as infanticide.' Families could exult in the *satīs*, as their cenotaphs portrayed, but none ever heard of a Rajput boast of the destruction of his infant progeny. The motive for infanticide was essentially the same that studded Europe with convents in which 'youth and beauty were immured until liberated by death'—the dread of dishonour. The laws regulating marriage, and the norms of expenditure among the Rajputs provided further incentive for infanticide. The life of a Rajput female was thus one of appalling hardship. 'In each stage of life, death is ready to claim her; by the poppy at its dawn, by the flames in riper years, while the safety of the interval

The forests and the mines too played important economic roles. But we are here concerned only with agriculture.

In a passage referring to the whole country between the Himalayas and the ocean, different kinds of land have been distinguished.¹⁵ The distinctions seem to have been drawn in very general terms. The expressions that have been used for different kinds of land are: *āranya*, *grāmya*, *pārvata*, *audaka*, *bhauma*, *sama* and *viṣama*. *Bhauma* has been interpreted as dry land; the meaning of other terms are clear enough. This passage gives us a general idea about the topographical variations in the country. In addition, we are also provided with some information about the average annual rainfall in certain parts of the country like Aśmaka (upper Godavari region), Avantī (Malawa), Aparānta (Konkan), etc.¹⁶ It is interesting that the rainfall mentioned by Kauṭilya accords quite well with the modern measurements of the rainfall of the concerned areas.¹⁷ It has been stressed that not just the total rainfall alone, but a proper distribution of it over various periods of the year was important for agriculture. 'One-third of the (annual) rainfall in the first and the last months (together), two-third in the intervening two months' were considered to be ideal distribution.¹⁸ The months most probably referred to are the monsoon months.

Land dependent on rainwater was known as *devamātrka*. And the land with perennial water supply, say, fed by a river, was called *adevamātrka* and was valued more because it yielded abundant crop.¹⁹ The rainfed land was again divided into two categories: *jāṅgala* (dry) and *anupa* (wet), on the basis of rainfall difference; the land with sixteen *droṇas* of rainfall was called *jāṅgala*, and the land with twenty-four *droṇas* of rainfall was called *anupa*.²⁰ *Jāṅgala*, although translated as dry, however, did not mean arid land; the arid land was called 'desert like'.²¹ On the basis of suitability to crops and humidity and water content, cultivable lands were again divided into the following types—*sthala* (dry), *kedāra* (marshy), *saṇḍa* (suitable for growing vegetable), *vāṭa* (flower and fruit garden).²² Normally, *sthala* and *kedāra* are in contrast but at some places to each other, *sthala* has been contrasted with *anupa*.²³ *Anupa*, thus, seems to have been a common term used both for land with high rainfall as well as a marshy land.²⁴ *Sthala* has also been contrasted with *audaka*, which was considered much better than *sthala*; a small piece of the former was considered preferable to a large tract of the latter because of the certainty of produce.²⁵ *Audaka*, thus, could have been the same as the *adevamātrka*. Similarly, *sthala* and *jāṅgala* were probably synonymous. Although not as desirable as the *audaka*, if cultivated properly and with suitable crop that did not require much rain for ripening (*sasyamalpavarṣapākam*), *sthala* could also yield a large harvest.²⁶ As *kedāra* is also mentioned in connection with the revenue to be collected from irrigation works, it appears that the term could also be used, apart from the land blessed with high rainfall, also for land receiving abundant water through irrigation.²⁷ The *Audaka*, *anupa*, *kedāra* lands seem to have been particularly suitable for the cultivation of paddy and the varieties like *sāli*, *vṛhi* were grown in such lands.²⁸ Muddy land, land with stone, saline and arid land were poorly thought of.²⁹

But the real quality of the land, according to Kauṭilya, is not how it is naturally endowed with. It is the human enterprise and effort that goes towards its utilization that really determines the quality. He concludes an interesting discussion on the

relative values of various kinds of lands by saying that 'land is what is made of it by man'.³⁰

And a major means of making a piece of land valuable was to make arrangements for irrigating it. We have already seen that a land not dependent on rainwater, *adevamātṛka*, was regarded as more valuable than a land exclusively dependent on rain or vagaries of nature. In view of its obvious importance, irrigation was a major concern of the state. The state initiated and encouraged irrigation projects. In fact, some types of agricultural land for the purpose of revenue administration were grouped under the heading 'irrigation work'.³¹ That practically all varieties of cultivable lands were put under this heading demonstrates how widely irrigation was used. It was natural, therefore, that the director of agriculture (*sītādhyakṣa*), a high state official, was expected to be an expert in the art of water divination (*śulba*).³²

Although the terms *setu/setubandha* was used in a general way for irrigation works of all kinds, a few the different methods used for irrigation can be distinguished. In the context of *setu/setubandha nadī* (river), *sara* (lake), *taḍāka* (tank), *kūpa* (well), *utsa* (spring), *ādhāra* (reservoir), etc., have been mentioned.³³ All these sources were tapped for irrigation.

It has been said that waterless regions (*anudaka*) as well as regions with water supply (*sahodaka*) should be provided with appropriate irrigation facilities. The state officials were asked to set up wells waterworks, and spring.³⁴ The expression *kūpasetubandhotsān* may really signify spring wells rather than three different kinds of irrigation devices.

Two more terms, *sahodakasetu* and *āhāryadokasetu*, have been mentioned.³⁵ They may mean river canal and storage reservoir for collecting rainwater, respectively. *Sahodakasetu*, with perennial source of water supply (river), like *adevamātṛka* land, was regarded to be more dependable than *āhāryadokasetu* dependent on.³⁶

In an interesting passage relating to water tax/rate (*udakabhāga*), four different methods of moving or lifting of water for irrigation are mentioned.³⁷ Since the rates differed for each, it can be logically surmized that the rates were linked to the efficiency of the methods. These four methods, arranged on a scale of ascending rates and efficiency, were: (i) *hastaprāvartim* or hand-moved; (ii) *skandaprāvartim* or shoulder-moved; (iii) *udghāṭam* or boosted; and (iv) *srotayantraprāvartim* or machine-moved. Hand-moved most probably meant manually drawing or throwing water from the source into the water channel running to the field. Various such manual devices are still practised. Shoulder-moved probably meant harnessing cattle for drawing water from the well. *Udghāṭam* must have meant some kind of boosting method similar to what later came to be stereotyped as the 'Persian Wheel'. *Srotayantra* may signify some kind of water lifting/moving mechanism driven by river currents.³⁸

There were state-run irrigation works as well as non-government irrigation works. The non-government ones were either owned by private individuals or run by the community.³⁹ In case of newly settled villages, the government extended help in setting up irrigation works.⁴⁰ Water cess was collected from every user of irrigation facility—even one using one's own irrigation device was expected to pay.⁴¹ However, private owners could offer the use of their facility to cultivators against payment of a part of produce.⁴² Any case of non-maintenance or keeping a irrigation facility out of

degree higher than women'. Men are managers over women because 'some of humankind excel others and because men expend of their wealth'. Thus, man is 'more excellent' and earns for the household; he has more experience and practical wisdom, which entitle him to manage women's affairs; he can admonish a recalcitrant wife or a wayward woman and leave her in bed alone; and he can beat her without causing injury. The relationship in the religious sphere was equal, but in the socio-economic sphere it was unequal. Consequently, women in Muslim societies could be oppressed and victimized. With regard to inheritance, the Quran enjoins that a male child 'shall have the equivalent of two females'. The widow is assigned one-eighth of her husband's legacy if he has children; if not, she receives one-fourth; and the widower gets from her wife's legacy twice the share assigned to the widow. The actual enactments of Muslim governments were much different from the provisions of the Quran.⁴²

The Quran talks of polygamy in the context of treating orphaned girls who had come of age, but their guardians were unwilling to give their properties back to them. Their guardians wanted to marry them to retain control of their properties. In this situation, the guardians were allowed to marry them, but only up to four. They were required to do justice to them all; otherwise they should marry three or two or only one. The classical Islamic law that grants general permission to Muslim males to take up to four wives is not faithful to the Quran. The spirit of the Quran Rahman emphasizes, is more in favour of monogamy than polygamy. The Muslim jurists favoured polygamy just as they ignored the Quranic injunctions regarding the manumission of slaves.⁴³

The Quran insists upon the continuance of a family and home, favours remarriage between divorced couples, and emphasizes reconciliation. A wife could be divorced twice and the divorced spouses could be remarried. A divorced woman was never to be prevented from remarrying her husband. On divorce the husband was not to take back any gifts he had given to the wife. The pronouncement of 'divorce' three times to ensure divorce at the spot was a travesty of the Quranic injunctions. Marriage of minors was allowed in classical Islamic law on the assumption that marriage was to be arranged by the parents and, in certain situations, it was desirable to perform the marriage rite of minors. On coming of age, each was free to annul such a marriage.⁴⁴ On the whole, thus, the Quran envisaged a position for women that was better than what it was in the contemporary societies, ensuring access to religious life, some rights to property, and divorce. It is important to note that the Quran created relatively more space and rights for women without discarding the wide framework of patriarchal values and structures.

According to Grunebaum, even when woman saints, preachers, and scholars were accorded generous recognition in Islam, 'the average Muslim preferred his womenfolk to stay home rather than to gain fame by unusual achievement'. While improving the position of women with regard to inheritance and allowing them free disposal of their property, the Prophet, apparently, had not done away with the general attitude that relegated women to a secondary place in the society. The elimination of women from public and social life was completed by the time of Harun al-Rashid.⁴⁵ According to Ruben Levy, women enjoyed with men the right to pray in the mosque, and they were not required to be veiled in the early centuries of Islam. The system of seclusion was fully established, however, with all the appurtenances of the harem, a century and a half after the death of the Prophet. The women were shut off from the rest of the household under the charge of eunuchs. The woman's capacity for practical affairs found expression within the harem and behind the throne. The harsh disapproval of the learned succeeded in driving women out of the mosque. They could attain saintliness as Sufi devotees. As the Persian Sufi poet Fariduddin

Attar (d. AD 1220) remarks about Rabia, the well-known woman mystic, 'since a woman on the path of God becomes a man, she cannot be called a woman'. Obviously, such a distinction, or lack thereof, was rare to achieve. With the passage of time the limited application of injunctions regarding the number of wives was made more general, and divorce by the husband was made far more easy, especially in the Hanafi law, more commonly practised on the Indian subcontinent. No limit was placed on the number of concubines that a man may keep in addition to or in place of a wife or wives. Certain bounds were placed only on unrestricted cohabitation with them. Prostitution was socially degraded, but officially recognized. Interpretations of the Quran by Muslim jurists and others were influenced largely by the specificities of the local societies.⁴⁶

Turning to the sultanate of Delhi, we notice that the Quranic injunction had some relevance only for the uppermost stratum of Muslim women, some of whom played a more or less important role in politics. The most noticeable example was that of Raziya who ruled as a sultan for a few years. According to the leading theologian of the time, who was also the Sadr us-Sudur of Sultan Iltutmish, Raziya was a competent ruler: prudent, benevolent, strict in justice, and considerate towards the people. Minhaj, an eyewitness, attributes her failure mainly to the prejudice of the male nobility. Even if she offended them by her love for a particular slave, this was only one more expression of their prejudices. A modest Muslim lady had no right to personal love. Writing some decades later, Isami gives vent to the Muslim male prejudice: 'A woman cannot acquit herself well as a ruler for she is essentially deficient in intellect. It is better for a woman to occupy herself with the spinning wheel [*charkha*] since attainment of high position on her part would make her intoxicated.' Or, 'all women', including 'a pious woman', are 'in the snare of the devil, in privacy all of them do Satan's work'.⁴⁷

Shah Turkan was the widow of Sultan Iltutmish who had purchased her as a slave. After the birth of a son, she was elevated to the status of a wife, with the title of Shah Turkan. After the sultan's death, she took over the reins of government on behalf of her son, Sultan Ruknuddin Firoz Shah. In the role of a regent, she issued orders in her own name too. Both she and the young sultan were removed when she caused the death of Prince Qutbuddin whom she regarded as a potential claimant to the throne. Another widow of Iltutmish married a senior noble, Qutlugh Khan, and got her son, Prince Nasiruddin Mahmud, released from the prison. She succeeded in getting her son placed on the throne and came to be known as Malka-i Jahan. Eventually, however, she and Qutlugh Khan were dislodged from their position of power and prestige by Balban (later Sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban). They sought refuge with the Mongol rulers in Central Asia. A daughter of Sultan Iltutmish divorced her husband on grounds of incompatibility, and married a regent, presumably in the hope of enjoying power in addition to prestige. These thirteenth-century ladies were followed by many others in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries but none of them exercised power directly.⁴⁸

Some of the Muslim women during this period were known for their piety and spiritual attainment. The mothers of Shaikh Farid and Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya were counted among them. Bibi Sharifa, the daughter of Shaikh Farid, was a pious lady. 'Had it been permitted', remarked Shaikh Farid, 'to give the *khilafatnama* and his *sajjada* to a woman. I would have given them to Bibi Sharifa'. He went on to add that 'if other women had been like her, women would have taken precedence over men'.⁴⁹ The Shaikh's appreciation for the Bibi also demonstrates that a woman could become a disciple of the Shaikh but not a successor. In fact, 'female mystics were never incorporated into *khanqahs* and orders'.⁵⁰ They could be saints in a personal capacity but they could not be authorized to guide

others. One such woman Sufi was in Delhi, Bibi Fatima, who in the eyes of Shaikh Farid was 'a man in the guise of a woman'. This reminds us of Fariduddin Attar's remark about Rabia Basri (d. AD 752/80/). Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya too equated women Sufis with men.⁵¹ A few woman saints of Kashmir are said to have preached the message of Shaikh Nuruddin Rishi, and sayings are attributed to them. But they do not seem to have a voice of their own.⁵² There is no doubt that the Chishti Shaikhs admitted women as their disciples, including slave-girls, probably with the consent of their husbands or masters. The Chishti Shaikhs advocated the manumission of slaves, both male and female, as a meritorious act. They favoured humane treatment of slaves. There are instances of enslaved Hindu women being returned to their homes by the Sufis or on their advice.⁵³

There was no provision of formal education for women in *maktabs* and *madrassas*, probably as a corollary of *purdah*, which prevented the women of the elite from access to these institutions.⁵⁴ There could also be regional variations. A sixteenth-century illustration of the Persian dictionary, *Milftah'l Fuzala*, compiled in Malwa in 1468–69, shows a girl writing on a wooden board along with other children reading under a schoolmaster.⁵⁵ Muslim women of the town of Hinawar on the west coast, for example, who followed the Shafi school of law, had separate schools for the education of girls. Ibn Battuta found at least thirteen schools for girls there, against twenty-three for boys. He adds, significantly, that he had not seen girls' schools elsewhere during his travels. As a corollary, one 'peculiarity' among the women of Hinawar was that they all knew the Quran by heart.⁵⁶

According to a fourteenth-century Arab account, even some slave-girls knew the Quran by heart, which obviously enhanced their value in the slave market.⁵⁷ This particular source perhaps assumes that the enslaved Indian women were converted to Islam. However, women were enslaved also by non-Muslim conquerors in India, sometimes including Muslim women.⁵⁸ At any rate, the institution of slavery was widely prevalent in the sultanate of Delhi. There was a wide range in the accomplishments and prices of slave-girls. The price of an ordinary slave-girl in Delhi under Alauddin Khalji did not exceed eight silver tankas. Girls fit for cohabitation as well as service could cost fifteen tankas. In spite of the general cheapness of slave-girls, there were some concubines in India whose price was 20,000 tankas or even more. Pretty Indian girls were reported to be superior to others in attraction. Good education, training, and attainments were their additional distinctions. Most of them were of golden or yellowish colour, but there was no dearth of the ladies of white and rose colour. There were girls of other nationalities available in Indian markets, but preference was given to Indian girls 'on account of their attraction and other qualities which the words cannot describe'. They were able to play chess and *chausar*, which added to their deportment, grace, and refinement. Many of them could write, recite verses, relate stories, and play the *sitār*.⁵⁹ As the contemporary historian Barani says in appreciation, 'Their coquetry could turn away the recluse from the path of righteousness, and restore the weary-hearted to life.' Courtesans adorned royal parties and entertained the elite with song and dance. They were patronized by the sultans and the nobles. Some of them became famous, like Nusrat Khatun, Nusrat Bibi, and Mahar Afroz. In Barani's words again, 'The birds came down from the air, and the listeners lost their senses; their hearts palpitated and their spirits got stirred.' Ibn Battuta describes the decorations of Delhi at the time of Sultan Alauddin Khalji's return from a distant campaign. The singing and dancing girls in every pavilion were wearing most beautiful dresses and ornaments; they greeted the sultan with their performance. There was a whole colony of musicians and dancing girls, known as *tarabābād* (the abode of pleasure), outside the walls of Siri, along the Hauz-i Khas built

by Alauddin Khalji.⁶⁰

The institutions of slavery, courtesanship, and prostitution, as well as the harem, continued to flourish during the Mughal period. Some royal women also played an important role in politics on behalf of their male relatives. There is evidence of the mystical leanings too of the women both within and outside marriage.⁶¹

IV

For specific evidence on gender relations under the Mughals, we may begin with Abul Fazl who takes up a few themes related to women per se. The imperial harem was put in the best order. The emperor formed matrimonial alliances to forge ties of harmony and peace in the world. In a large enclosure with fine buildings inside, each of the 5,000 women dependent on the emperor had a separate apartment, divided into a number of sections, with several chaste women appointed as *dārogāhs* and superintendents over each section. The expenditure of the harem was superintended by a clever and zealous writer attached to the private audience hall. The inside of the harem was guarded by sober and active women; outside the enclosure eunuchs were placed; a guard of faithful Rajputs was at a proper distance, beyond whom were the porters of the gates. On all four sides were guards of nobles, *ahadīs*, and other troops. Faithful persons were elevated to several ranks in the service of the seraglio; its security involved the prestige of the emperor. There was a regular procedure for allowing the wives of the nobles and other respectable women to enter the harem. The emperor took personal interest in the arrangements. With minor variations, this basic idea of the seclusion of royal ladies remained operative even when they travelled from one place to another. Several thousands of *kahārs* or *pālkī*-bearers were kept for this purpose.⁶²

A later description of the royal camp on the move provided by Bernier makes it absolutely clear that the ordered seclusion of the harem was properly maintained. The tents of the princesses, and of great ladies and the principal female attendants of the seraglio adjoined the royal tents. The tents of the ladies were enclosed on every side by rich *kanāts*. In their midst were the tents of inferior female domestics and other women connected with the seraglio, placed generally in much the same order, according to the offices of the respective occupants. The princesses and great ladies had different modes of travelling, with the common feature of *purdah*. The pomp and glitter of the procession does not conceal the fact that it was well guarded by well-mounted eunuchs and a multitude of lackeys on foot. It was difficult for strangers to approach these ladies; they were 'almost inaccessible to the sight of man'. It was dangerous to come close to the procession. The eunuchs and footmen were eager to avail of any such opportunity to beat a man in the most unmerciful manner. To avoid three things was proverbial: the horse's kick, the hunting ground, and an approach to the ladies of the seraglio.⁶³

The second important theme for Abul Fazl is marriage, which was strongly upheld by the emperor as a necessary institution for regulating sex and reproduction. Akbar abhorred marriages that took place before the age of puberty; they brought forth no fruit and were even hurtful because on maturity the couple disliked the tie. Therefore, 'girls before the age of fourteen, and boys before sixteen were not to marry', maintained the emperor. The consent of the bride and the bridegroom, as well as the permission of the parents, was absolutely necessary to marriage contracts. Marriage between near relations was highly improper. The emperor disapproved of high dowries; they were mere sham and hardly ever

paid. But dowry could prevent rash divorces. The emperor did not approve of everyone marrying more than one woman; polygamy ruined man's health and disturbed the peace of the home. For old women to take young husbands was against all modesty. According to Abul Fazl, officers were appointed to see that the bride and the bridegroom were not mismatched, and a tax was imposed on marriage, its amount depending upon the circumstances of the bride's father.⁶⁴ Akbar is also reported to have ordered that, 'should a Hindu woman fall in love with a Muhammadan, and be converted to Islam, she would be taken away by force, and handed over to her family; but so should also a Muhammadan woman, who had fallen in love with a Hindu, be prevented from joining Hinduism'.⁶⁵

Akbar showed keen interest in education, its methods and content, at primary and higher levels, but only for boys.⁶⁶ Abul Fazl does not visualize any formal education for women or girls. The education and cultural attainments of the celebrated royal women like Gulbadan Begam and Jahanara, thus, were a result as much of the imperial set-up as of their ability and effort, rather than being a reflection of the social situation.

According to Badauni, Akbar ordered that if a Hindu woman wanted to be burnt with her husband 'they should not prevent her; but she should not be forced'.⁶⁷ Apparently, Badauni was not happy with Akbar's order. Father Rudolf Acquiva, the Jesuit missionary, too was unhappy with the emperor's early response to the custom of becoming *satī*. He wrote from Fatehpur Sikri that he was invited by the emperor 'to witness the burning of one of the Hindu women who cremate themselves along with the bodies of their husbands'. Since Akbar was openly patronizing the observance, saying that such faithfulness came from God, the Father 'rebuked him with well-chosen words'. The emperor took it well. This was in 1580.⁶⁸ Later on, the *Āin* records his positive disapproval of the practice: 'How could the sacrifice of the wife's valuable life be considered a source of the husband's salvation.' In 1583 Akbar personally saw to it that prohibition against forced *satī* was enforced after a Rajput officer's death.⁶⁹

Jahangir makes a policy statement with regard to the practice of becoming *satī*:

In the practice of being burnt on the funeral pyre of their husbands, as sometimes exhibited among the widows of the Hindus, I had previously directed, that no woman who was the mother of children should be thus made a sacrifice, however willing to die; and I now further ordained, that in no case was the practice to be permitted, when compulsion was in the slightest degree employed, whatever might be the opinion of the people.

These injunctions did not infringe the *Smṛiti* law, but Jahangir was aware that *satī* was linked with the religious ideas of the people. Therefore he goes on to add: 'In other respects they were in no wise to be molested in the duties of their religion, nor exposed to oppression or violence of any manner whatever.'⁷⁰ The humanistic impulses of Akbar and Jahangir harmonized with the spirit of the Quran, but not with the spirit of the *Smṛitis* and the Puranas.

The practice continued, albeit regulated by the state, and with the approval of the local administration. English traveller Ralph Fitch makes a crisp comment on the practice in the reign of Akbar: 'The wives here doe burne with their husbands when they die; if they will not, their heads are shaven, and never any account is made of them afterwards.'⁷¹ Writing in the reign of Jahangir, William Hawkins does refer to the emperor's command that 'none may burne without his leave'. When they came for permission the emperor tried to persuade them to desist from the act with many promises of gifts, but without success.⁷² Another Englishman, Withington, saw many cases of *satī* in the reign of Jahangir in different parts of the country. The first one he saw was that of a ten-year-old girl whose

marriage was not yet consummated. Her soldier husband was slain in an action, and the widowed girl was prepared to burn herself with his clothes. The governor ordered that she should not burn herself as 'she had never layen with her husband'. Her friends went to the governor with a present and he accepted their plea in favour of the girl's decision. They burnt her to ashes with her husband's clothes. Withington goes on to add that the kinsfolk of the husband never forced the widow to burn herself, but her own people held it a great disgrace to their family if she should refuse to burn herself. If a widow agreed to become a *satī* and then got scared in face of the fire, her father and mother would take her and bind her and throw her into the fire to be forcibly burnt. Not many widows refused to burn themselves and seldom wavered in their resolve. Withington was talking of Rajput women. When the 'Banian' dies, says Withington, his wife shaves her head and wears jewellery no more; in this state she spends the rest of her life. If a Rajput woman does not burn herself with her deceased husband, she too must shave her hair and break her jewels; she is not allowed to eat, drink, and keep company with anybody; she lives in this miserable state till her death.⁷³ Another traveller, Terry, observes that widows voluntarily became *satīs*; the people assembled for this 'hellish sacrifice' made a loud noise so that 'the screeches of this tortured creature may not be heard'. But not all widows burnt themselves; they cut their hair and spent all their life as 'neglected creatures'; they never married. One way of escape from this miserable life, says Terry, was to seek 'martyrdom' by burning themselves.⁷⁴

The Dutch traveller Pelsaert states, however, that there were thousands of women who did not become *satīs* and 'there is no such reproach as is asserted by many'.⁷⁵ Two or three cases of *satī* nevertheless occurred every week in Agra among the Rajputs, Khattris, and Banyas of the city, observes Pelsaert. He witnessed one case in which the widow was only eighteen years old and also had a child born to her. The governor pressed her strongly to dissuade her from her undertaking, offering 500 rupees a year for the rest of her life. But she rejected the offer, and the governor was helpless because he was not allowed by Jahangir's order to refuse his consent. Before entering the hut in which lay the corpse of her husband, she gave away her jewels and costly clothes to her friends, distributed a handful of rice to all the bystanders, kissed her baby, and handed it to her nearest friends. When she set the hut on fire and entered it, the friends piled wood before the door, and everyone shouted out 'Ram, Ram!' When the burning was over, everyone took a little of the ash 'which they regard as sacred, and preserve'.⁷⁶

Bernier was able to dissuade a widow in Agra from her resolve to burn herself with the body of her husband. Her generous and commendable resolution was believed to redound to the honour of the family, but she was the mother of young children and her friends wanted her to live and rear them. Apparently, she was influenced in her resolve by some old women and Brahmans. Bernier's patron, Danishmand Khan, was prepared to settle a pension of two crowns a month on each of her two sons if she decided to live. She was also told that as a mother she would incur no stigma if she decided not to become a *satī*. Despite her initial refusal, she abandoned her resolve and her husband's corpse was burnt without the widow. Bernier thought that the incidence of *satī* had been reduced due to the policy of the Muslim rulers 'to suppress the barbarous custom'. There was no positive law forbidding the practice, but it was checked indirectly by offering support against external pressure and the means of subsistence for the widow and her children. Still there were many 'shocking exhibitions' of 'the fortitude displayed by these infatuated victims'. In Rajasthan Bernier witnessed the self-immolation of a widow and five female slaves who died without the slightest indication of pain or even uneasiness. The five women slaves were actually singing and dancing when they jumped into the pit of fire. It is not clear

whether they died as concubines of the master or as slaves devoted to his widow. Another scene that remained vivid in Bernier's memory like 'a dreadful dream' was what he witnessed in Surat. A middle-aged woman who, sitting with the corpse of her husband, with 'brutish boldness' took hold of the torch and with her own hands lighted the fire from within while Brahmans were kindling it from without.⁷⁷

Rather than the spirit of sacrifice or the 'excess of affection' for the husband, this abominable practice in Bernier's view was the effect of 'early and deeply rooted prejudices', which extolled the virtue of the deed and ensured the subjection and attention of women to men.⁷⁸ A story was current in India that a Hindu woman rejected by a Muslim lover decided to burn herself with her dead husband, but carried her lover also forcibly into the fire. Quite apart from this cynical and ludicrous story, Bernier was sure that there were widows who would have recanted if it had been possible. There were instances of such 'affrighted victims' being physically pushed back into the fire. In one instance, at Lahore, the hands and feet of a twelve-year-old widow were forcibly tied lest she should run away from the pyre. Rescuing an unwilling victim from 'the burning pile' was unthinkable for a Mughal, but many widows were reported to have been rescued by the Portuguese in sea-ports where they were in power. In north India a widow could sometimes elude the vigilance of 'the murderous priests' to fall willingly into the hands of 'the scavengers'. In her own family she could never hope to pass her days in happiness or to be treated with respect or affection, observes Bernier.⁷⁹ Manucci relates the story of an unwilling widow forcibly rescued from Brahmans, and married by an Armenian who lived in Surat afterwards and had a son by her. On the complaint of Brahmans, emperor Aurangzeb issued an order that in all lands of the Mughals 'never again should the officials allow a woman to be burnt. The order endures to this day'.⁸⁰ We know, however, that the practice of *satī* did not cease.⁸¹

Marital love upto the point of *satī* appears to be equated with *ishq-i haqiqi* or the love for God. However, by this time, *ishq-i majāzī* or worldly love also was becoming an accepted thing. For example, the well-known story of Hir and Ranjha was first composed in the reign of Akbar. By the time Waris Shah wrote his classic in the second half of the eighteenth century, different versions of this popular legend had been composed.⁸² Ganesh Das narrates the tales of Hir and Ranjha, Sohni and Mahiwal, and Mirza and Sahiban with feeling and sympathy, evincing a sneaking appreciation for the lovers and also a sense of helplessness. He equates the lovers with martyrs, and attributes spiritual powers to them; their burial spots became places of pilgrimage, and those who had stood in their way were ruined. At the same time, he seems to suggest that love between persons from different social and ethnic backgrounds did not fructify and ended in tragedy.⁸³ In fact, custom, law, and the state were opposed to personal love as the basis of marriage.

Bernier talks of the women who danced before gods and in front of the chariot on festive occasions. Some of these women were celebrated for beauty and were remarkably reserved in their general deportment. They felt so dedicated to the ministry that they refused presents from strangers, whether Muslim, Christian, or Hindu. Then there were other singing and dancing girls, called *kanchanīs* (the gilded, the blooming). They were not prostitutes seen in the bazaars, but of a more private and respectable class. They were invited to attend the weddings of the nobles for the purpose of singing and dancing. Most of them were handsome and well dressed; their limbs were extremely supple and they danced with wonderful agility. They went to the open *darbār* once a week even in the reign of Aurangzeb. They were patronized by the nobility as well as the royalty.⁸⁴ Inducted into the profession as slave-girls, some of them rose into great prominence. One such girl was Munni who was sold by her widowed mother as a child and became a renowned dancer in

Delhi in the early eighteenth century. In 1746 she was invited by Nawazish Khan, the nephew and son-in-law of Ali Wardi Khan, to perform at the marriage celebration of his son at Murshidabad on payment of 10,000 rupees. She was at the prime of her career in her early twenties, and she captivated the heart of Mir Jafar by her superb performance and charm as much as by her beauty. Mir Jafar married her, and Munni Begum exercised extensive influence in Bengal as his widow till her death in 1813. The author of the *Siyar al-Mutakkhkharin* refers to her as 'wealthy, wise and influential', capable of becoming 'unrivalled among the contemporary women'. There were other women of humble origins who, like her, had risen into great prominence.⁸⁵

It has been observed that the life of seclusion did not mean a life of total dependence and subjugation. The women of the *zenāna* in Delhi during the early eighteenth century enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy, with a considerable degree of control over their time. Their life developed an independent rhythm, both as an expression of collectivity and individuality, from which men were eased out. 'The *zenāna*, therefore, was far from a place where its inmates were bleeding under the subjugation of patriarchy and before which they were helpless.'⁸⁶ It must be added, however, that the spaces that women created for themselves were created within the general framework of patriarchy. Its limits could be transgressed only at peril.

Rigidity of the social organization was alleviated a little also by several religious and secular fairs that were thronged by men and women, young and old. Sujan Rai Bhandari writing in the 1690s particularly dwells on such fairs around his home town, Batala, in the upper Bari doab of the Punjab. He mentions the fair on the *mazār* of Shah Shamsuddin Daryai near Batala. He gets carried away while writing about the fair at Achal. There was music and dance, and merchandise for both men and women; the young men felt gratified to behold beautiful damsels.⁸⁷ Apparently, *purdah* was not observed by the women coming to the fair. Ganesh Das too describes the popularity of such fairs in the Chaj and Rachna doab, and in and around Lahore, most notably, the fairs at the *khānqah* of Khwaja Ali Hujwiri, the mausoleum of Shah Abul Ma'ali, and the *mazār* of Madho Lal Husain. The *chaubārā* of Chhajju Bhagat and the *khānqah* of Sayyid Mitha, in addition to the place of Sakhi Sarwar, also drew a cross-section of the populace, both men and women. The shrines of Sitala Devi and Bhaddar Kali probably attracted only Hindus of both sexes.⁸⁸ Similarly, as noticed by Sujan Rai, men and women of all ages from all over visited Kurukshetra. Bathing in its tank brought merit.⁸⁹ There is sufficient evidence to suggest that there were several regional constellations of major and minor sacred places of different persuasions that were thronged by men and women.⁹⁰

Some legal documents from Surat in the mid-seventeenth century throw light on the privileges enjoyed by the wife of a Muslim merchant of the port city. A deed of marriage (*nikahnama*) mentions the dower (*mahr*) of 3,000 rupees and one gold dinar; one-third of the amount was to be paid immediately and the remaining two-thirds at some later stage. There were other conditions stipulated: the husband was not to marry another woman; he was not to beat the wife except for embezzlement and in that case too not to be so severe as to leave the marks of the stick on any part of her body; and he was not only to maintain her but also to live with her for a lunar year. If any of these conditions was infringed the wife was to consider herself forbidden to her husband 'as if by a single act of divorce'. If the husband kept a slave-girl as a concubine, the wife could sell her off and keep the amount as dower (*mahr*), or free her. The monogamous implications and humane treatment of the wife assimilate this legal document to the position in the Quran. There are other documents, mentioning one or more of these conditions, and the implications of infringe-

ment, including separation (*tafrīq*) for the wife and payment of mihr out of the husband's property. A few of the documents carry the suggestion that a widow could hold the property of her deceased husband.⁹¹ In fact, 'a model marriage contract' reproduced in a Mughal administrative text of 1694-96 suggests that by this time 'certain standard terms of contract' in marriages among the lower and middle-class Muslims appear to have developed, which 'protected the wife against bigamy, concubinage and abandonment'.⁹²

Documentary evidence from Batala clearly shows that women entered into legal transactions as vendors and mortgagors of immovable property inherited by them. Among them were both Muslim and Hindu widows, owning agricultural land, shops, and havelis. In the case of a share in common property, either with a son or a co-inheriting widow, the consent of all shareholders was required for a legal transaction of sale or mortgage. In one case some land originally granted as *madad-i ma'āsh* (revenue-free land for subsistence) is owned by the widow of a Shaikh and her two sons. In another case, the owner of two shops is the widow of a Saiyid. Among the other Muslim women owning property in the town are the widows of a tailor and an oil-presser (*kunjadgar*). The daughter of the oil-presser also owns a shop. Among the Hindu women who inherit immovable property, the majority are widows of Khatri. There is also the widow of a goldsmith. Son-less widows, whether Muslim or Hindu, could dispose of their property in any manner they liked. Incidentally, there was a Brahman *tawāif* (singing and dancing girl), living in a room rented out to her by a very respectable Bhandari Khatri of the town.⁹³ The legal documents executed at the qazi's court were common to almost all the towns and cities of north India. In the towns of Gujarat, for example, sale and mortgage deeds were executed by women owning urban property. A few Muslim women in Surat managed, or claimed the right to manage, their husbands' business affairs. Some Khatri and Brahman as well as Muslim women in Uttar Pradesh owned agricultural land. The widows of grantees inherited land received by their husbands or their ancestors by way of *madad-i ma'āsh*.⁹⁴

Apart from these ladies owning and managing land, there were others who directly participated in the productive processes in rural and urban areas to help the family or even to receive wages. Short of ploughing, there is evidence of the women helping in agricultural operations in a number of ways. They husked rice and worked on hand-mills. Their tasks in the home were not confined to the kitchen or the village well. Besides tending the cattle and milk products, their part-time jobs included beating cotton, ginning and spinning were. Dyeing and printing of cloth were done by women in many artisanal households. As evident from paintings, a considerable number of women worked as labourers in construction in urban centres. In agriculture and artisanal production their tasks were generally complementary or parallel to those of men. The sources point to some women directly mediating with the market as hawkers, selling bangles, cotton and silk thread, milk products, vegetables, flowers, fish, and parched grains. Many professional innkeepers, rope dancers, and magicians were female. There was an equally diverse range of the women selling their services as sweepers, water-carriers, workers in taverns, midwives, nurses, teachers, domestic and temple servants, and harem attendants.⁹⁵ Thus, women performed a variety of jobs in and outside the home. To what extent they were independent of men in their professions or were privy to all the processes in production is not clear. The relative ratio between the wages of men and women is also not clear. Even as wage labourers, women appear to have worked under the control of their men, howsoever powerless and oppressed the latter might have been outside the home. There is some evidence of the men and women of the labouring classes, who were also rated socially low, turning to devotional movements in search of freedom from social constraints and spiritual fulfilment.

V

It is generally believed that the 'popular Bhakti movements' in medieval India were egalitarian and humanistic in import, with implications also for gender relations.⁹⁶ It is stated in a recent publication that though women continued to be regarded as inferior to men, and dependent upon them, the *Bhakti* movement tended 'to diminish the strong prejudice against women'. Indeed, 'the essential humanism of the *bhakti* poets tended to raise women and give them a more honoured position in society'.⁹⁷ Kabir, for example, was strongly opposed to the idea that a true devotee should break his family ties and live like a recluse. His concept of equality did imply that the path of true knowledge and devotion was open to women. This did not mean, however, that Kabir postulated equality between man and woman. In the first place, his ideal woman is the devoted wife (*pativrata*) who adorns herself only to please her spouse. She should also win the affection of the other members of the husband's family. Thus, Kabir reflects the social values of his time. He refers to the practice of *satī* in laudatory terms. He contrasts the devoted wife with the prostitute who sells her wares at the market place. He looks upon adultery as theft. He distrusts woman as the eternal temptress (*kāminī*) who represents *māya* in its quintessence. Thus, there are two kinds of women: those who are devoted to their husbands and those who are an obstacle to man's salvation. Woman was welcome as a submissive and dedicated wife, but she was to be avoided as the embodiment of lust (*kāma*). Kabir appears to open the path of liberation to women rather grudgingly.⁹⁸

Tulsidas was close to Kabir, dividing women into *uttam* and *neech*. His well-known verse may be seen as referring to the latter as follows: 'A drum, a villager, a Shudra, an animal and a woman deserve to be chastised'. Made independent, women became wayward and broke the bounds 'like a water channel in flood'. They should have no access to the *Vedas* and the *Dharmashastras*. However, there were also women who were well-versed in religion, and even in worldly affairs. They were devoted to their husbands and played an important role in safeguarding the family as the prized institution. Their best roles were those of wife, mother, sister, and daughter. Out of these four, the first was the foremost. A woman's dharma was to serve her husband with absolute dedication of body and soul. For women as a class, Tulsi has no good word: she desires every handsome man, whether he be her brother, father, or son. Woman's sexuality was the greatest hindrance to man's liberation. She represented the most dangerous form of *māya*. The way of salvation was open to women only through marriage and devotion to Rama as householders.⁹⁹

Dadu talks of both equality between men and women, and woman's subordination to man. She represents *māya* too. What was important in life was devotion to God, whether one was a householder or a recluse. Dadu's collected works contain more than eighty verses in which a true sant is compared with the wife who burns herself on the pyre of her deceased husband and to a warrior who lays down his life for the sake of his master. This valorization of *satī* does not mean approval of the custom. Dadu says that it would have been better for these women to have sacrificed themselves for the sake of Rama who was the only true husband and protector. There is little of misogyny in Dadu and he is more emphatic than Kabir in opening the path of liberation to women. They could even be *bairāgans*, unattached to men and attached solely to Rama. Dadu's well-known disciple Rajjab, however, lauds *pativrata* in women and her dependence on her 'lord's' grace; he looks upon women as a source of distraction from the true path.¹⁰⁰

The *gopīs* of Surdas reject the ideal of the *Dharmashastras* in favour of devotion to Krishna. For a woman who devotes herself completely to God, family ties are secondary.

She is at par with man for the four-fold objective of dharma, artha, kāma, and moksha. For Surdas, woman was neither a sex object nor a symbol of lust. She had human frailties, but she was essentially the symbol of gentleness, devotion, compassion, and love. Surdas was thus a non-conformist humanist. Another devotee of Krishna, Mira, herself acted as a rebel. Though her basic attitude towards women's role in society was conventional, she represented a voice of protest. There was a dichotomy between Mira's behaviour pattern and the ideas and values she upheld.¹⁰¹ On the whole, thus, the protagonists of Bhakti were more liberal in the sphere of religion than in the social sphere. The patriarchal family was generally accepted as the norm, though it could also be seen as secondary in importance to religious life.

If there is one message that sums up the meaning and purpose of Chaitanya's Bhakti movement in Bengal at the most popular level, it is that Hari has mercifully descended as Chaitanya to deliver all of humankind from evil, especially women, Shudras, and sinners. In twentieth-century writings on Chaitanya, the 'sinners' are said to have been ignored, and women and Shudras have been treated rather uncritically, without adequate reference to sixteenth-century evidence. In the hagiological literature related to Bengal Vaishnavism, Chaitanya's mother and his wife are treated with great respect, and so are the wives of the major male devotees. Certain women give initiation to a circle of devotees, which included males. One woman makes disciples of her own and effectively takes charge of coordinating Vaishnava activities in the region after the death of her husband. A woman of the third generation of the movement is herself a guru and seems to wield considerable authority in the south-west of Bengal. Thereafter, there is hardly any eminent woman. As the enthusiasms of the early movement settle down to more staid transmission of cherished modes of piety and learning, the traditional subordination of women to men seems to have been established among Chaitanya devotees as elsewhere in Bengali Hindu society.¹⁰²

Much stress was laid in Bengal Vaishnavism on sweetness, humility, and loving service by males as well as females. In the theology of the movement all humans were ultimately females in relation to God. The prominence of Radha as Krishna's loving consort could further reinforce the value of being female. However, it would not be safe to equate religious poetic symbolism with empirical social situations. Women Vaishnavas did not hold positions in the institutional organization. Both the offering of hospitality and alms within the community in the sixteenth century and the enhancing of personal esteem of the women devotees could become points of departure for more radical efforts at altering economic and social structures, but there is no evidence of any radical departure in the Chaitanyite movement.¹⁰³

Guru Nanak's compositions have been analysed from the gender perspective. At one level, women are a part of māya for men. Significantly, the woman also figures as the dupe of māya. Consequently, she becomes the female counterpart of Guru Nanak's self-centred person (*manmukh*), with the possibility of becoming a *gurmukh* (turning towards God as a disciple of the Guru). A longish stanza in his Bani on the pandit's prejudice against meat presents women in a favourable light. There is no ambiguity about Guru Nanak's rejection of the taboos of impurity associated with child birth and menstruation. He feels deeply anguished over the rape of women by Babur's soldiery. There is a total absence of mysogyny in the compositions of the Guru. Procreation is a necessity and the institution of family fulfils this social obligation. Fidelity on the part of the husband is as important as dedication on the part of the wife. The dedicated woman is the *banjāran* of Rama: she trades in the Lord's name. The bairāgan discards all self-centredness (*haumai*) and turns towards God; immersed in 'Truth', she is oblivious of social disabilities.¹⁰⁴

The number of verses in which Guru Nanak appears to address himself to women, or gives contextual comment on them, or uses female voice, is quite large. However, the range of ideas expressed in these verses is not very wide. He appears to create a larger space for women than what we find perhaps in the whole range of north Indian literature springing from devotional theism. Total equality of woman with man in the spiritual realm is basic to his message: it was not confined to female bhikhus or bhaktas. His '*Sikhs*' were to pursue spirituality as householders. Guru Nanak's attack on discrimination against women due to physiological differences was a long step towards gender equality. There is nothing in the compositions of Guru Nanak to support inequality of any kind. However, the patriarchal family is taken for granted and 'much of the space he creates for women is created within the patriarchal framework'. Religious life is made an integral part of domestic life; the public sphere open to women also pertains to religious life.¹⁰⁵ Their subordination in the domestic sphere also gets extended to their overall subordination in the religious sphere.

The relative position and role of men and women in the community of believers becomes explicit by the early eighteenth century. An eighteenth-century manual of conduct (*rahitnāma*) lays down norms for Sikh women as well as Sikh men. The woman was expected to be well versed in the beliefs and practices of the Sikh faith, to visit the Sikh place of worship (*dharmsāl*) twice every day, and to serve the institution with her labour and offers in kind; she could preach in a public assembly of women; and she was to perform her domestic duties with care and diligence while pursuing a life of piety and devotion. The social framework of the *rahitnāma* is patriarchal in which the woman's sphere is in the home, and she remains subordinate to the male members of the family. In matters religious, however, she can instruct even her husband. On the whole, through her observance of the prescribed conduct (*rahit*) she is presented as the guardian of the Sikh faith.¹⁰⁶

Religious movements in the south, having an important bearing on gender relations, arose earlier than in the north. The Bhakti movement in Tamil Nadu provided a spiritual alternative to women much before the eleventh century. Andal gave expression to 'bridal mysticism' in her love for Kannan (Krishna), and the vision of her marriage with Sri Ranganatha. She is envious of the conch that Kannan touches with his lips and would tear out her breasts to fling them at 'that deceitful robber and dissembler Govardhan'. The earthly husband is rejected in her quest for Krishna. Another prominent woman saint, Karaikkal Ammaiyar, worships Nataraja, the cosmic dancer; the vigour of his dance cannot be borne by the universe. Witnessing his dance she becomes a 'female ghost', with shrivelled breasts and bulging veins. She was canonized as an ascetic renunciant who granted boons. There were several other woman saints, less spectacular than Andal and Karaikkal, and a large number of women who figure in the hagiographies of over three scores of Nayanars. Women saints obviously belonged to both Shaiva and Vaishnava Bhakti. The emergence of monasteries from the tenth century onwards became a major factor in the exclusion of women from the spiritual sphere.¹⁰⁷

Women were prominent in the Virshaiva movement in Karnataka since its inception. More than thirty woman saints, forming nearly one-third of the Virshaiva saints in the twelfth century, composed devotional songs (*vachanas*). The majority of these women were Shudra, and included some 'untouchable' women too. Quite a few of them rejected the institution of marriage, and even the whole concept of gender and caste. Akka Mahadevi is startlingly bold and intense in offering herself to God. Eventually, she discarded her dress and used to go naked. She was still praised by some male and female saints, but criticized by others. Women saints had a strong tendency to perceive themselves as brides of the Lord. They could be contemptuous of the human husband, but adored the divine. The

body remained the only vehicle of self-realization and self-expression. Occasionally, there is transcendence of the paradigms of love and sex, but generally there was a tension between the rejection of patriarchy at the empirical level and the use of the patriarchal mode of expression at the metaphysical level. Significantly, the Shiva linga continued to remain the supreme symbol of Virshaivism. Wearing of the linga was supposed to free the Virshaiva women from the disabilities associated with menstruation, childbirth, and widowhood. The Virshaiva women partially succeeded in overturning patriarchy in the social order, but not for a long time. By the fourteenth century the 'patriarchal notions of a widow as a curse and a wife as a chattel' appear to have been restored. Patriarchal forces managed effectively to integrate within them the extremely powerful voices of the Virshaiva women saints.¹⁰⁸

The Warkari movement in Maharashtra provided scope of self-expression for women. Among the Warkari women saints there were Brahmans, Shudras, and outcastes like Bahinabai, Janabai, and Soyraibai. Among them was also a devadāsi, Kanhopatra, who was valorized. The notion of the bride of the Lord was almost absent in the Warkari tradition. Kanhopatra throws her body at the feet of the Lord to be protected by the 'protector of the fallen'. The broad gender equality within Warkari panth was visible in its tradition of bhajan and kīrtan, particularly in the course of *warī* or pilgrimage to Pandarpur. Despite the inclusion of women within the sacred space, the ideology of the panth remained rooted in the patriarchal framework. There was a certain degree of social protest in the works of female as well as male saints of the movement, but fulfilment was sought in spiritual self-expression without seeking to overturn the social structure. In Warkari literature there are articulate expressions of conflict between the path of Bhaktī and domestic responsibilities, which male saints could disregard but female saints could not. Bahinabai felt constrained to say: 'A woman's body is a body controlled by someone else. Therefore, the path of renunciation is not open to her.' Even when women were vocal and visible in the movement, the sacred spaces they occupied were not carved out by them; these were conceded to them by men. The Brahmanical revival under the Peshwas during the eighteenth century reinforced patriarchy, and women were ousted from the spaces they were occupying and pushed back within the narrow domestic walls.¹⁰⁹

VI

We can see in retrospect that the position of women in the social order did not remain the same from the eleventh to the eighteenth century. On the whole, spirituality was now made far more accessible to women, though the tension between the pursuit of spiritual fulfilment and conjugality could not be resolved in all situations. In terms of rights in immovable property too, the position of a small section did improve. Moveable property or *strīdhana* probably had no meaning for the lower classes and castes, but more women among them appear to have participated in the productive processes and earned cash wages. Women became relatively vocal and visible, and found self-expression in a number of ways also in the political system and in cultural life. There were differences in their relative position and role in terms of class, caste, and occupations. Different religious systems and the historical experience of different regions also altered the gender roles in some respects. *Purdah* varied according to the social class, age, and marital status and marriage custom rather than religious affiliation. It essentially signified an arrangement by which conformity to social norms was ensured, particularly among the upper classes.¹¹⁰ Polygamy was practised

only by the upper classes, irrespective of religious affiliation. Time-honoured institutions like marriage and slavery could result in social mobility for some women.

Among the labouring classes, however, even when women contributed to material life, their role appears to have largely remained supportive, which they combined with child-rearing and household responsibilities. In their case the patriarchal value system expressed itself differently. The extent to which they actually worked outside the home, or negotiated with the market place or appropriated their earnings, depended upon the particular occupational category and the kinship practices in a particular region. In most other situations women ventured outside the home probably for religious merit and for participating in festivals or fairs. On the whole, however, the old grooves were too deeply etched and the old framework of patriarchy was too strongly in place to allow women to create much space for themselves. Notwithstanding the 'glimmers of compassion, a consciousness of inequity, even some possible improvement', the capacity of the Indian cultural traditions to generate substantive change remained 'limited'.¹¹¹ Thus, Akbar's 'concern for a better treatment of women' could not make much difference on the ground. Individual rulers in medieval India tended to uphold the societal norms as much out of conviction as to gain legitimacy and to keep the patriarchal family intact as a revenue-paying unit, which also furnished soldiers for the state.

The strength of continuities in the structure of gender relations may be illustrated with reference to contemporary evidence from seventeenth-century Rajasthan and eighteenth-century Maharashtra. In the aristocratic families of Rajasthan a distinction was made between *sohāgans* and *dohāgans*, the former being the favoured and the latter disfavoured wives. Despite the dowries they brought as their personal property, their dependence on their husbands was almost complete. It was very seldom that dowry included immovable property. A large number of other women of the *zenāna* were also dependent on the master of the house. Only in exceptional cases did the children of the concubines have a claim on the state. Marriage alliances were subordinated to political considerations and social status of the males. The companions (*sahelīs*) of the widow also burnt themselves with her husband to prove their loyalty. Wives were abandoned for what may be regarded as personal whims. Remarriage of elite women was unthinkable. Any form of protest was penalized. Women died from time to time and fire consumed them, but not always for the love, affection, or respect for their husbands.¹¹²

Legal documents from Maharashtra under the Peshwas relate among other things to marriage, adoption, adultery, dowry, and code of conduct for widows, especially among Brahmans. The legal age of marriage for Brahman girls is stated to be seven to ten years. There is a great insistence on the correct performance of the ceremony of marriage, and also on the upholding of conjugal rights. Adultery by women was looked upon as a grievous offence and punishment ranged from fine to mutilation. A Brahman woman committing adultery with a Muslim was trodden to death by an elephant. Out of twenty-seven cases of adultery and rape available in these documents, capital punishment was awarded in two, mutilation in one, imprisonment in eight, fine in fifteen, and excommunication in one. The fine ranged from 100 to 5,000 rupees. Sometimes the murder of an adulterous woman by her husband was pardoned by the government as honour killing. Strict action was taken against those who falsely accused a woman of adultery because of the implications of such accusation for the family. The widow indulging in adultery, or not conforming to the other rules of widowhood, was punished harshly. A widow living by herself, away from her in-laws or her natal family, was suspect. Remarriage of widows was allowed on payment of a fee only in the case of non-Brahmans. In one case a Brahman was punished heavily for arranging

the remarriage of his seven year-old widowed daughter. Adoption was allowed according to the *Shastras*: a brother's son was preferred to a sister's. Polygamy was allowed, giving rise to disputes about inheritance. The judicial system functioned with the active support of the clan and caste leaders who controlled the *gotsabhās* and *jātisabhās*.¹¹³

The ideological underpinnings of the 'continuous and combined surveillance' of women by the community and the state was articulated in 1735 in the *Yādi Dharmasthāpanā*, literally 'memorandum of the establishment of the *dharma*', which aggressively invoked the provisions of the *Manusmriti* with regard to caste and women. 'Crucial to the *dharma* were the rules and norms about Brahmana women', and in the case of errant women of the lowest castes, the state punished them by making them available to men of the higher castes or by inducting the women into slavery.¹¹⁴ Thus, the somewhat liberalizing impact of the movements of spiritual regeneration in Maharashtra was relegated to the background in this conception of the *dharmarājya* based on the *Dharmashastras*.

VII

The social situation in medieval India has been illumined generally by comparison with ancient and modern periods on which a good deal of work has been done. It may be more interesting to turn to medieval Europe for points of comparison with medieval India in terms of gender relations.

Eve was made from Adam and not in God's image: man, therefore, was the head of woman and managed matters for her. A female was a 'misbegotten male', a biological imperfection useful only for reproduction. Married women in medieval Europe were generally not allowed to inherit or bequeath land, or to appear in court in their own behalf. Their legal personalities were non-existent: under much of medieval European law a woman was her husband's property, like his horses. Men could either marry, become ascetics, or live as bachelors. Women could choose only between marriage and the life of a consecrated virgin. The idea of spinsterhood was foreign to the thinking of 'patristic theologians': they assumed that any woman who did not choose virginity would marry. Thus, marriage was a poor second to a life of chastity. A disproportionate admiration for virginity led to the view that women were to be judged according to their sexual status, with the virgin high above the married woman in holiness and virtue.¹¹⁵

Sexual sins were given prominence in the penitentials and penance books compiled for use in monasteries. A large number of penitential cautions and prohibitions clustered around menstrual blood and its harmful effects. Churchmen were anxious to keep women away from the sacred objects of worship. Closely related to pollutions of menstrual blood were those which clung to a woman after the birth of a child, particularly a female child. The child was favoured over the mother at birth: if it came to a choice, the infant's life was to be saved at the cost of the mother's. A woman who died before she had been purified after giving birth was refused burial in consecrated ground. Motherhood entailed risks, but marriage without children was unthinkable to patristic writers. Indeed, copulation was surrounded with guilt and enmeshed in a tangle of restrictions. On about 220 days in a year, it was explicitly forbidden. It was generally assumed that the husband controlled the act, and the wife sinned only if she willingly consented.¹¹⁶

Writers of the twelfth century revived the genre of satire and used it to ridicule women's sensuality. They had nothing good to say about marriage, with an implicit condemnation of women. They dwelt on the traditional range of feminine vices: stubbornness, arrogance,

overweening lust, jealousy, vanity, faithlessness, and shrewish competitiveness. Women were tricksters who knew how to cheat and lie, to make their husbands support other men's children; these passionate and impassioned whores were worse than what the poet could tell. A common description of the female was recorded in the following words: 'Woman is man's confusion—an insatiable beast, a continual care, the dwelling of turbulence, an impediment to chastity, a man's destruction, the channel of adultery; she is the enslaving of a man, and his heaviest weight of all.' A woman beaten by the husband was expected to bear it with patience. There is abundant evidence of physical mistreatment of women and the popular beliefs about their innate inferiority to men. At every level of credence, the myth of feminine weakness and vice was perpetuated, and no woman was free from its stigma.¹¹⁷

The concept of the Christian virago, a woman in body but a man in mind, was sought to be projected. The woman was to conquer the spirit of mindless vice and pleasure by cultivating manly virtues. Whereas sensuality and self-indulgence were seen as feminine, self-discipline and reason were seen as masculine. Only by becoming a man in her mind could a woman control her unruly and sinful body. The concept of virago reinforced the patristic doctrine that admirable women were rare. The restrictions and incapacities of law concerning women could be justified on this assumption. However, there were voices of dissent too. Praise of women was not entirely foreign to writers. Some of the preachers began to exalt marriage as the agency of concord in human affairs. However, philogyny remained weaker than mysogyny, and in the face of strong anti-feminist opinions, rehabilitation of marriage could not go far to rehabilitate ideas about women.¹¹⁸

The experience of individual women could be at odds with the abstract restrictions of theology, law, literature, and folklore. However, the power, achievements, or relative freedom of a few noble and literate women offered no proof that the rest of them were similarly unhampered by theoretical restraints. Women were generally excluded from most of public life. From the thirteenth century a large number of women in northern Europe chose to live together in the self-supporting houses called 'beguinages'. They imposed on themselves a regimen of piety and religious observance, but they took no vows and spent their productive time making cloth. A woman was free to leave such a house at any time and was not directly answerable to any man; within her community, she was entirely self-determined and entirely self-supporting. These houses offered women the first respectable alternative to binding monastic vows or marriage.¹¹⁹ This was part of a larger phenomenon in which women were beginning to labour in the fields, clear woods, pull thorns and brambles, and work assiduously with their hands to strive for their bread.¹²⁰

Furthermore, a growing number of women defied the law of the church, which decreed that no woman, no matter how learned or holy, would presume to teach men assembled together. Women began to preach and to assume priestly functions. They were active and vocal participants in groups regarded as heterodox in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. They appeared somewhat similar to the north European 'beguines' and, like them, these heretical women began to be denounced and persecuted. A virgin from England claimed that she was the Holy Spirit made incarnate for the redemption of women. She baptized women in the name of the Father, the Son, and herself. After her death her corpse was exhumed and burnt. At least two of the women who believed in her died at the stake. The circumstances of Eve's creation, and her grave sin, proved the inferiority of all women and attempts to redeem them were effectively opposed. All attempts to shape a counter-vision of women were drowned out or suppressed.¹²¹

Thus, both in medieval India and medieval Europe, scriptural authority and prescriptive texts could be invoked to treat women as inferior to men, and as the abode of vices and

weaknesses. The law codes obliged women to conform with male notions of correct conduct. Reproduction was regarded as the woman's main social function, but it was tainted by the associated pollutions and biological disabilities. Chastity as a value was given the highest importance. The use of physical force was considered legitimate to control the woman's sexuality and to regulate her conduct. Her contribution to the domestic economy went unacknowledged. However, unlike medieval Europe, medieval India did not have a centralized church and an ordained priesthood upholding celibacy. Celibacy for women certainly did not have the same kind of importance in medieval India. Instead, there was a plurality of moral systems generally favouring the married state. In fact, marriage was regarded as the most important stage in life for both men and women, but it was for the family or the social group and not the individual, to decide about it.

In daily life in medieval India upper-class women were generally respected as mothers, but son-less widows among the upper castes were degraded. The social worth of lower-class women was probably built into their usefulness for productive processes, with a fairly clear gender division of labour in both agricultural and non-agricultural production. Most women, except in aristocratic families, did not have access to formal education. Schooling, if at all, was for a minimal time as children. Sometimes, women working in their personal capacity as palace attendants, slave-girls and prostitutes acquired literacy and education. However, the participation of Indian women in politics, business, and property transactions was largely on behalf of their male relatives. At any rate, the outstanding women figuring in the pages of history were a product less of the general social situation and more of their own initiative and enterprise. The emancipatory visions appropriated by women in medieval India were centred essentially on spirituality and freedom from the constraints of caste, whereas in medieval Europe they were embedded in productive work and financial independence. Women in medieval India could be opposed for their religious ideas and practices, but they were never burnt at the stake. In both medieval India and medieval Europe revolutionary women were canonized as saints and accommodated in a more or less traditional framework. Unlike Europe, much of the traditional social framework, with its patriarchal ethos, has continued well into modern India.

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- 1 Robert Shoemaker and Mary Vincent (eds), *Gender and History in Western Europe* (London: Arnold, 1998), Introduction, pp. 1, 2.
- 2 Irfan Habib, *Exploring Medieval Gender History*, Indian History Congress Symposia Papers: 23, Calicut, 2000, p. 1.
- 3 Originally a doctoral study, Ashraf's work was serialized in the 1930s and reissued as a book in 1959. His humanistic sympathies and grasp of the ground realities in the changing socio-political environment of the period has imparted a lasting value to his observations. Aspects of gender relations are taken up largely under 'Social Condition'.
- 4 K.M. Ashraf, *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970 [2nd edition]), pp. 164–5, 174–5.

A universal social phenomenon, patriarchy has been defined as 'the systematic arrangement of social, economic and political power in ways that benefit male members of the society, and ensure the subordinate status of women'. This arrangement, geared essentially to the control of female sexuality and labour, could achieve hegemony because it rested on the consent and cooperation of the women themselves for the enforcement of its norms. Janaki Nair, *Women and Law in Colonial India : A Social History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996), p. 11.

Much before the inception of the medieval period in Indian history, the patriarchal value system enunciated by Manu, among others, had acquired the force of an ideology and instrument of social

control. The woman was to be respected and guarded for family stability and purity, and controlled for her inherent weaknesses and also for her potential as a temptress. She was considered inferior to man and suffered from impurities during menstruation, childbirth, and miscarriage. She was not supposed to have a will of her own and should therefore live a life of perpetual dependence on her male relations. She was to be married off before puberty and was not entitled to sacraments, education, property (other than *strīdhān*), public career, or remarriage. Marriage was the only sacrament permitted to her, and her salvation lay in devotion and fidelity to her husband both during and after his life. The only alternatives to the married state and perpetual widowhood were prostitution and the *sangha*, to which 'following the husband on the funeral pyre' came to be added later on. Since the time of the *Arthashastra* the king was assumed to be the ultimate agency for the enforcement of the patriarchal norms. For details, *The Ordinances of Manu (Mānav Dharm Sāstra)* (translated by Arthur Coke Burnell, edited by Edward W. Hopkins) (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint, 1971), II, 66, 213–14; V, 64, 66, 147, 154, 155; IX, 2, 3, 9, 46, 88, 162, 165, 166 in particular.

- 5 Ashraf, *Life and Conditions*, p. 166.
- 6 Ibid., pp. 169, 177, 179, 181, 182, 264, 271, 272.
- 7 Ibid., pp. 167, 168, 169, 170, 171–6.
- 8 Ibid., pp. 186–92.
- 9 Ibid., pp. 192–4.
- 10 Ibid., pp. 165, 167–8 and n. 5, 168, n. 1.
- 11 Ibid., pp. 53–7, 171–6.
- 12 Ibid., p. 170.
- 13 Ibid., pp. 103–5.
- 14 Ibid., pp. 244, 264–7.
- 15 Lokesh Chandra Nand, *Women in Delhi Sultanate* (Allahabad: Vohra Publishers and Distributors, 1989).
- 16 Rekha Misra, *Women in Mughal India (AD 1526–1748)* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967). This was a doctoral thesis approved by the University of Allahabad in 1965.
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- 18 *Alberuni's India* (translated by Edward C. Sachau) (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1989 [reprint]), vol. I, p. 181.
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- 20 Ibid., pp. 155–6.
- 21 Ibid., pp. 156–7.
- 22 Ibid., pp. 157, 162.
- 23 U.N. Ghoshal, 'Social Life', in R.C. Majumdar (ed.), *The Delhi Sultanate: The History and Culture of the Indian People* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, 1967 [2nd edition]), pp. 592–5.
- 24 Ibid., pp. 594–9.
- 25 Ibid., pp. 583–8.
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- 30 Ibid., p. 192.
- 31 Wahid Mirza, *The Life and Works of Amir Khusrau* (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delhi, 1974 [reprint]), p. 186.
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- 33 Ibid., p. 507.
- 34 Ibid., p. 215.
- 35 Ibid., vol. II, pp. 374, 380, 402, 404, 501, 525, 601.
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- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 88; also, pp. 90–96.
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- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 147. Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century* (Delhi: Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i Delhi, 1974 [2nd edition]), p. 264; J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History* (Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1979 [reprint]), p. 103.
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CHAPTER 28

Akbar: The Name of a Conjuncture

Kumkum Sangari

Akbar appears to have traversed a large number of denominational and sectarian spaces. Besides a series of more or less evidential and contemporary accounts of encounters between Akbar and the Parsis, Jains, Jogis, and Jesuit missionaries, and contemporary diatribes from Muslim and Brahmanical orthodoxy, there were recurring and probably fictitious encounters in different registers between Akbar and saints, bhaktas, sufis, and pirs in seventeenth-century hagiographies, some of whom were his contemporaries.

Historians are usually interested in determining the veracity of these hagiographical encounters. The prolonged circulation of these narratives and the retrospective assemblage of Akbar in the seventeenth century could lend itself to another set of questions. Why is Akbar the only king who is the object of such excessive narrativization? Why does Akbar feature with such regularity in hagiography even at the expense of bending dates to make saints inhabit his lifetime? Why is he invoked in and beyond Aurangzeb's era, and what is the content of these invocations? Did these invocations indicate a different horizon of expectation, one that conjoined with a social process and a specific state formation; in other words, did they invoke a singular conjuncture—one not existing in the recent past and receding by Aurangzeb's time, even though some elements pre-existed Akbar and persisted beyond his lifetime? If taken together with other contemporary accounts and diatribes, the hagiographies describe a space for rethinking many questions, most especially those of denomination, classification, and conversion.

I

Some suggestive hagiographic codes emerge in the supposed encounters of Akbar with Pir Hassu Teli, Mirabai, Dadu Dayal, Surdas and Tulsidas. In the fables recorded by Surat Singh in *Tazkira-i Pir Hassu Teli* (1652) Akbar is presented as a king with spiritual inclinations in constant search of a true preceptor. He is unable to find such a preceptor due to the machinations of his own courtiers who include religious bigots and protagonists of

'false religion' such as Abul Fazl. Abul Fazl resorts to some tricks in order to deflect Akbar's attention from finding his true preceptor in Pir Hassu Teli.¹ In this fable Akbar is eligible for initiation, sought to be incorporated but being trapped in court intrigue, he is circumstantially, though by no means inherently, doomed to be a failed, frustrated seeker. The pir only manages to 'cure' Abul Fazl of his false faith.

The encounter with Mira is gendered: empty both of philosophical discussion and miracles. The fact that Akbar is accompanied by Tansen, connoisseur of music, also indexes Mira as a performer, blurring the already fluid line between performance and devotion in Krishna worship. In hagiographies of male saints, Tansen acts as a conduit between Vaishnava lyrics and the court—he sings their compositions to Akbar, and on Akbar's request leads him to them. Nabhadas, possibly a contemporary of Akbar, refers obliquely to Akbar visiting Haridas, but does not suggest a meeting with Mira. Priyadas introduces it in his early eighteenth century *tika* on Nabhadas' *Bhaktmal*. Akbar is said to be entranced by Mira. Priyadas seems to be placing the encounter in a mode shared by hagiography and romance—hearing of Mira's beauty and oral performance is a sufficient catalyst for arousing Akbar's desire to see her. Such desire is natural and unquestioned—to want to see is to want to embody, substantiate, personalize a travelling voice, a reputation. Akbar and Tansen, enthralled by the image of Krishna, offer a verse at his feet.²

In *Dadu Janma Lila* (c. 1620) Jan Gopal identifies himself as an ascetic and a *banya*. In Jan Gopal's hagiography, and more so in the near-contemporary enlargement and interpolation, Dadu's low-caste status and possibly Muslim origin are blurred, he is divinized, and this encounter with Akbar seeks to establish his superiority over Akbar.³

Hearing of Dadu and impressed by Dadu's pupil, Akbar repeatedly asks him to come to the court. He perceives Dadu as a latter-day Kabir. Raja Bhagwant Das (adoptive father of Man Singh) undertakes to persuade Dadu, who in turns puts the decision on Ram. Getting a favourable answer, he goes accompanied by his disciples and by Jan Gopal. The courtiers, Bhagwant Das, Abul Fazl, and Birbal—precede Akbar. Functioning as intermediaries, they greet Dadu and question him about his faith. Dadu rejects what is in fact a complex initiation into the court that involves Birbal and Bhagwant Das as centrally as it does Akbar; he distinguishes himself from sycophantic courtiers and false Brahmans (one such Brahman, Tulsi, is said to be in the thrall of maya and likened by Dadu to a prostitute), and refuses various court etiquettes.

Dadu professes his faith in the indescribable God with no name, no fixed abode—he is Dayal, Gopal, Allah, Alakh, Sirjanhar, Apar, Ram, Rahim, Mohan, Vyapi. Throughout identified with the tradition of Kabir, Gorakhnath, and others, he enters the court under the insignia of Kabir—uttering the names of Ram, Rahim, and Allah—further aligning Akbar with that same tradition.

In a sense, Dadu stands in for Kabir, who had his own confrontations with rulers but was not, probably, hagiographically updated to encounter Akbar. In court, Dadu presents himself as there on the order of his master, a passive instrument with Rama as musician, and his every action as dictated by his master, that is, as outside the orbit of Akbar's power.

A question-answer session with Akbar on the six systems concludes (in a brief interpolation) with Akbar folding his hands and bowing his head in admiration. Dadu advises him to give up worldly attachments and sexual desire. Akbar impressed by his teaching (*upadesh*), expresses his eagerness to continue the discussion (*goshti*). Dadu's refusal troubles Akbar. Raja Birbal tries to mediate, telling Dadu that the emperor is seen as an '*avatar*', worshipped as a god by both Hindus and Turks, and even Dadu should pay him some respect.⁴ Dadu refuses; he worships only One.

The raja's own discussions with Dadu lead to his worshipping Rama and culminate in the disappearance of his doubts. He shows Dadu palaces, temples, a palace of mirrors; Dadu is unimpressed and pronounces them unreal. Their discussions last for forty days.

The raja advises Akbar to just humbly ask for Dadu's blessing, and the ruler agrees; Dadu comes but does not greet him. In the ensuing conversation Akbar expresses his willingness to learn, to infuse his heart with truth, to commit himself to the path described so that he too may find *Gusaiyan*.⁵ Dadu then blesses him. Akbar begs him to take whatever he likes—gold, villages, parganas, elephants, horses—as a gift to support himself and his followers. Dadu refuses, advising the emperor to give up his empire, wealth, and women (*kanak kamini*), and treat all beings impartially.⁶

Here, a subsequently interpolated set of verses claim that from this moment Akbar himself stopped hurting living beings, made it illegal for others to do so and considered Dadu his pir. This aroused the wrath of qazis and mullas, and they begged the Prophet for a miracle that would put Dadu in his place. Akbar is eager to see where the real power lies. On his orders a throne is prepared and Dadu is invited. Dadu guesses what is afoot to the amazement of Abul Fazl and Birbal; he does arrive but ensconced on a strange, radiant throne that appears in the sky. Akbar is terrified and bows saying Dadu is the master and he the slave (*tum murshid main garib gulam*)—all his doubts about who is the most powerful disappear.⁷ The miracle, added later to aggrandize Dadu, has a somewhat brow-beating cast and, given Akbar's pliability, would be unnecessary if something more than the personal religious allegiance of Akbar was not at stake: miracles enter a competitive logic where 'converting' Akbar through a public and spectacular display is a means of silencing Muslim orthodoxy. The qazis and mullas declare that Dadu is the pir of Hindus and Turks.⁸

Dadu agrees to the request to stay on in court, reiterates his rejection of its luxury and of gifts from Birbal. Such an impressive rejection of maya further consolidates Birbal's new-found faith. The same drama of persuasion is also repeated with Raja Bhagwant Das. Much of the detail of the 'conquest' of these two courtiers is a part of the later interpolations and serves to counterpose the divinization of Akbar by his courtiers through the stratagem of relocating their allegiance to an even higher authority. Significantly, though Abul Fazl too appreciates Dadu, no such attempt is made with him. These sections cohere with the rest of the narrative where Dadu's miracles change the faith of a range of persons—a Muslim, a yogi, merchants, and once again, Raja Birbal.

Though Akbar is de-divinized, his character remains intact, untarnished. Akbar is impressed with Dadu's knowledge and asceticism; he freely and spontaneously offers assent and worship. His questions are at once those of a sceptic and a devotee, and this scepticism, except in the throne episode, is mild and benevolent, it virtually invites conversion. The narrative characterizes him as intelligent, able to discern good from evil.⁹

In Mahipati's *Bhaktavijaya*, Surdas Madanmohan is in the official employment of Akbar in the district of Mathura. Surdas first spends all his own money and then all that is in the king's treasury on hospitality to Vaishnava saints. When told about his empty coffers, Akbar is enraged and sends his officers. Surdas, after giving them a box of fake jewels and a sealed letter explaining that he has spent all the king's money on a worthy object—sadhus and saints—disappears into the forest. The letter acts as a revelation for Akbar, it shows him the way to the otherworldly; he not only punishes those who had slandered Surdas, but is personally grateful to Surdas for showing him, hitherto intoxicated by his royal position, that he should be seeking spiritual riches.

He sends his officers to find Surdas who, when located, comes to Hastinapur (Delhi). The king receives him with honour, embraces him, declares he did not know of the worthy

object of Surdas' expenses and wants him to return to his post. Surdas says he has put aside desire for worldly things and does not want to be ensnared by them again. Akbar answers, now that Surdas has become a *virakta* who has cast away illusory thoughts, he can resume his former authority and spend all the money for the well-being of saints, no one other than him is wise enough to serve the Vaishnavas in Mathura, and he should do so now on the authority of Akbar. Surdas, thinking to himself, 'If I can attain the supreme spiritual riches while still engaged in worldly things, I should not turn away from doing so', agrees, and departs, with a written authorization from Akbar to feed the saints.¹⁰ Here, Akbar appears as a benevolent and pliable king, relaying his power of distributing largesse.

The blind Surdas had been less amenable in a somewhat earlier hagiography, the late seventeenth, perhaps even early eighteenth century, *Chaurasi Vaishnavan ki Varta*. This was a Pushtimarg hagiology describing Vallabhacharya's own disciples, ascribed to his heir Vitthalnath's son Gokulnath (1522–1641), but probably compiled from oral tradition by Hariray, a great grandson of Vitthalnath said to have lived from 1591 to 1711. Hariray included his own commentary called *Bhavaprakash*.¹¹

In *Chaurasi Vaishnavan ki Varta* Akbar is said to have summoned Surdas to his court on hearing Tansen sing his verse, and being very impressed by his spirituality, attempted to reward him with gifts of wealth and land. Surdas, however, scornfully rejected such worldly considerations and curtly forbade Akbar ever to bother him again.¹² In this and other typical tussles with authority he gains a spiritual and symbolic victory.¹³ Akbar the benefactor is both vanquished and incorporated. But here too, Akbar's wisdom and discrimination are not denied. The commentator's explanation in *Bhavaprakash* softens Surdas' rejection in a profoundly suggestive way.

The latent aggression of the miracle finds its apogee in Mahipati's hagiographic rendition of Tulsidas in the *Bhaktavijaya*. Here, Tulsidas, said to be the avatar of rishi Valmiki, is born in the house of a wise Brahman named Atmaram who is in the service of Akbar. The early part of the narrative mentions that Tulsidas joined Akbar on his royal tour.¹⁴

However, before Tulsi encounters Akbar in sant style, his sense of religious boundaries is already fastened to a sharp demarcation between Hindu and Muslim in the narrative. Tulsidas encounters Maruti in the guise of a Brahman in the forest and asks for the gift of a manifestation of Ram. Subsequently, Ram and the monkey army pass in front of the hermitage of Tulsi who does not recognize them:¹⁵

He said to himself 'Some Muhammedans are passing by.' The monkeys seemed heroic and Shri Ram seemed to be the king of the Muhammedans. Seeing them thus, Tulsidas made them a *namaskar*.

Maruti returns to tell him he has met Ram. Tulsi denies it and insists that 'the one who passed by my hermitage was truly a Muhammedan. I did not see Ram'. Maruti reminds him that he has already been guilty of a series of misrecognitions—he has seen a wish cow as a goat, a clever parrot as a dove, wish trees as ordinary trees, a Brahman as a herder of goats, pearls as glass, swans as crows, and now Ram as a Muhammedan. Tulsi replies:¹⁶

O swami, you accuse me unjustly, but Ram who fills all space and pervades the space is invisible.... Milk comes from water but one should not call water milk. All water is the same but the *chatak* bird will not drink the water that is on the earth. So the worshipper of Ram does not consider him as appearing in many forms. The Dweller in Ayodhya, the life of Janaki, was holding his bow and arrow in the same way as Valmiki described him. Show me that appearance.

Ram is a bit unwilling. How can Tulsi be given 'a direct manifestation in *kaliyuga*', but is finally persuaded by Maruti on the ground that Valmiki's avatar, born to propagate the worship of Ram, deserves to see him.¹⁷

Tulsidas settles into his bhakti in Benaras, performing many miracles including that of bringing a dead man to life. Akbar is informed and makes an attempt to see the miracles for himself; he asks his ministers to send a learned and articulate Brahman as messenger, one who would incline Tulsi to come to Delhi. The minister goes with several such Brahmans, tells Tulsi that the king has heard him to be a 'most extraordinary, god-loving Vaishnava *bhakta*' and wants to see him.¹⁸ Tulsi thinks this may be a good opportunity to spread the worship of Rama in Delhi, and goes.

The king comes forward and falls at his feet, seats him on his own throne, whispers a command to his servants not to allow Tulsi to return, and then proceeds to worship Tulsi with the 'sixteen materials for worship'. He tells Tulsi:¹⁹

I have heard of your wonderful power and that you have made yourself into a god. You made the stone bull eat food. In the giving of a blessing, you brought a corpse to life. Your deeds seem impossible to me. I do not understand your power.

Tulsi says it is all the doing of Rama. Akbar wants to meet Rama and says he will not allow Tulsi to leave until he arranges the meeting. Akbar retires to his palace thinking: 'If he will show me a manifestation of Rama, then only will I regard Tulsidas as a noble Vaishnava.'²⁰

Akbar's servants confirm Tulsi's imprisonment. Tulsi invokes Maruti, who performs a miracle; he calls together his army of monkeys, and commands them to show their 'natural characteristics' to Akbar.²¹ The monkeys go on a rampage: they break tiles and trees, they break the noses of some and cut off their ears, twist off the necks of others; snatch the clothes of women going to fetch water and throw them in the Jamuna, and fasten together the braids and beards of mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law. Those who do not worship Rama or persecute Vaishnavas are thrown into stinking drains. The storerooms of evil merchants are looted. They enter the palace and cut off noses and ears; throw dirty water on the 500 wives and concubines of the emperor, seize evil men—thieves, adulterers—in the palace, lift them and throw them down from above; and seize garments and ornaments and give them to the poor and hungry. They make the poor rich, they rob merchants, beat those who speak the untruth. The orgy of violence is at once arbitrary, ugly, patriarchal, sectarian, and utopian.

Wise men advise Akbar to stop persecuting Tulsi otherwise the monkeys will turn Delhi upside down. Akbar now confesses his fault and injustice. He folds his hands and tells Tulsi:

'I persecuted you, because in my ignorance I did not know what I was doing. Duryodhan suffered humiliation when he persecuted the good Draupadi. So it has happened to me by my persecuting you.'²²

Tulsi answers that Akbar has just seen what is only an advance contingent of Rama's army; after 18 billion monkeys have arrived then Rama which follow; Akbar's good fortune has no limit, Rama is indeed coming to see him. Akbar says he has already seen enough of Rama, grasps Tulsi's feet, saying he did not understand Rama's power; if 10,000 monkeys can create such destruction then 18 billion would mean the end of the world. Hearing the king's 'pity-arousing' request the monkey army becomes invisible and all men worship at the feet of Tulsidas. Tulsi then spends a year in Delhi, until all inhabitants begin to repeat the name of Rama, after which he takes his leave of Akbar.

Mahipati lived from 1715 to 1790 in the period of Maratha–Mughal conflict, but his hagiographies seem to occupy different temporal locales. The excessive compliance of

Surdas is very different from the aggression of Tulsi. In some respects the latter is a reversal narrative. It begins with the father in the emperor's employ and the son, a natural hanger-on, and ends with the son vanquishing the emperor.

The narrative's intensification of Akbar's scepticism not only increases his adjudicatory powers, but produces ambiguity: impressed, respectful, and worshipping Tulsi, he is also the king whose determination to test the true from the false Vaishnava (a classic trope in the encounter of the devotee with established power) puts him in the position of an antagonist. In the end he is an emperor humbled by the force of miraculous violence, that seems to induce acquiescence to a superior power rather than spontaneous or rational faith. Significantly, the moment of Akbar's acquiescence is also one of 'mass conversion' and it is his acquiescence that allows Tulsi to persist with his proselytization until he has convinced the whole of Delhi.

At another level in the *Bhaktavijaya*, Akbar is only one in a series of encounters between saints and kings. Anonymous Muslim kings appear several times. An evil Muslim king goes to Namdev's kirtan and kills a cow. Namdev must now revive it in order to prove he is true worshipper, otherwise he too will be killed by the king. When Namdev revives it the king responds with a *namaskar*.²³ In a contest between Sena the barber and another wicked Muslim king, Krishna goes disguised as the barber and converts him to the worship of Hari.²⁴ When Latibshah, a Muslim, becomes a pious Vaishnava and worships Ram, he is persecuted by a Muslim king. The soldiers who come to arrest him are so enthralled with the *Bhagavata Gita* that they forsake the king's service. The king arrives and is enraged by the Vaishnava ritual, the tulsi altar, and the wall painting of ten avatars. He, however, is converted not to Vaishnavism but to a grudging acceptance by the miracle of a painting coming to life: Radha accepts the *pān* that Krishna is offering, the red mark of the *pān* disappears from the wall.²⁵ Hindu kings also persecute saints, like Janajaswant, but model, kings like Kashipati, are patrons of Vaishnava saints.²⁶ Saints in turn protect rulers. Because Shivaji comes to visit Tukaram, he is protected by Krishna in his battles, who even disguises himself as Shivaji to defeat 'Muhammedans'. In another story, Shivaji is persuaded to renounce the luxury of sleeping on palatial beds by the ascetic Ganeshnath.²⁷

It is evident that in these narratives Akbar is at once a prototypical king, the object of the archetypal, even quasi-allegorical encounter or contest between worldly power and a holy person, and occupies a special space as a pre-eminent and recognizable *historical figure* who is the multiple object of sought affiliations, of persuasion, of enforced acquiescence and of conversion. The fact that Akbar enters all hagiographies as a historical figure, often accompanied by identifiable and named courtiers sets him off from the stereotype of the unnamed bad 'Muhammedan' king of other hagiographies, as in Mahipati's *Bhaktavijaya*. What are the nuances and implications of such historicization and personalization of Akbar?

In the discursivities of devotion, Akbar comes to signify a more extensive, regionally disparate, system of symbolic attribution than any other ruler. This also suggests a new relation between regional locations and the 'centre' in which the initiative and the power of incorporation seems to rest with both.

Different accents intersect in Akbar as a 'sign', but they do not change its fundamental form in the discursive field of devotion. The multiple registers of the narratives remain tied to a directionality. Despite the increased aggression of later combative and browbeating accounts, he never becomes a zealot or religious persecutor. Is this to be attributed to the unifying power of the very structures of hagiography? Or is it that Akbar was invoked in Aurangzeb's time and beyond because he had both popular and imperial legitimacy? Do the hagiographies represent a still widely imaginable range of possibility, a social horizon?

Many stock formulae of hagiography appear, of course. The encounter of holy persons with priestly, monarchical, or other figures emblematic of local power, is a recurring motif in hagiographies that record the rise, struggle, and self-legitimation of new or heterodox devotional forms and cults. The wrestle between forms of spiritual and temporal authority can be traced back to ancient narratives of Brahmins and Kshatriyas.

In this perspective, Akbar is the formulaic object of the encounter with an authority whose rewards are more often than not rejected as well as the object of a sought conversion that may or may not be gained. The king's 'surrender' or persuasion too is a sedimented sign of symbolic victory often accompanied, paradoxically, by his patronage, that is, relations of dependence.

And yet, invoking the staple tropes of hagiography does not exhaust the issue. The fact that Akbar continued to be narrativized, retrospectively, in the era of Aurangzeb and beyond, when relations of power had altered and the Brahmanization of bhakti as well as the renewed influence of Muslim orthodoxy were determining hagiographic interpolations, makes of him (in Volosinov's terms) a sign that has not been withdrawn from the pressure of social struggle, a sign that retains a live social intelligibility, around which historical memory and contemporary desire can cluster. If hagiographies are tied to the power of their own generic structures, they also exercise another privilege of extended orality: the power of omission and reinterpretation.

Finally, what was the location of hagiographies—were they popular or elite? They do seem to occupy diverse social levels 'below' the court, though these levels and the interaction between 'high' and 'low' have to be determined with far more precision than what can be attempted here. To some extent, their figuration of Akbar not only exfoliates from the court, but corresponds to it or is continuous with it. The narratives are not pure or wholly autonomous constructions or expressions of a popular *mentalité* bearing no relation to the courtly or self-projection of Akbar. But nor are they fully 'corrupt'—that is, permeated by or incorporated into dominant models. Rather, they enter into a play of contradictions.

II

At this stage in the argument, it may be useful to turn to the more or less evidential, recorded encounters of Akbar with Chishtis, other sufis and Gosain Jodrup.

Akbar's desire to make a pilgrimage to Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti's shrine in Ajmer was aroused after hearing the songs of some minstrels at Midhakur, near Agra, glorifying the Khwaja.²⁸ He went first in 1562, then again in 1568 after his conquest of Chittor and presented the Khwaja's khanqah with a huge cauldron. The wealth from the offerings of Akbar and his entourage resulted in a dispute among the Khwaja's descendants and was placed before Akbar in 1570 when he came to proffer thanks for the birth of his son. Akbar investigated and settled the dispute by transferring management of the shrine to Shaikh Bukhari.²⁹

This same powerful royal arbiter also melted, effortlessly, into a humble pilgrim. He had made that special pilgrimage from Agra to the Ajmer shrine on foot to fulfil his vow of thanksgiving for the birth of his son. Salim, later known as Jahangir, was born in Ajmer in the house of a Chishti Sufi, Shaikh Salim, and named after him.³⁰

Akbar's relationship to several Chishtis was marked by munificence,³¹ reciprocity, and loyalty. Shaikh Jalal Thanesari of the Chishti order was an ascetic who usually refused to meet noblemen. When Akbar visited him on his way to Kabul in 1581, he was aroused from

an ecstatic state by his disciples. Informed of the presence of the emperor, he ordered them to help him stand so that he might perform his obligation to his khalifa, that is, to Akbar, and then proceeded to recite prayers for the successful outcome of the emperor's expedition.³² One of Salim Chishti's disciples, Shaikh Taha Chishti, was visited by the defeated but still rebellious Sultan Muzaffar of Gujarat. The sultan asked Chishti to dress him in his armour as a sign of his blessing. Taha replied that God had assigned Gujarat to Akbar and therefore he had no power to interfere. The Sultan threatened to have the mystic killed before Akbar arrived, but finally agreed to wait a week before ordering his execution. By that time the war was over, the Sultan was killed, and Gujarat belonged to Akbar.³³

Akbar is said to have been skilful in his use of influential Sufis both to further his schemes of conquest and to systematize his rule. Those who chose to live as ascetics were, however, offered stipends and revenue-free land grants. But he was also careful to moderate the power of those Sufis and ulama who could be potential opponents.³⁴ Sufi attitudes too were not uniform. Babur's conquest gave an impetus to the development of the Naqshbandi order. Later many Sufis migrated to Akbar's court, obtaining high posts in civil and military administration. They were generally loyal to Akbar and supported the broad-based policies that he introduced after 1579, but some Naqshbandi pirs did oppose his religious policies.³⁵

The royal arbiter could also function outside the canopy of devotion. The succession dispute of Shaikh Hamid's sons—Shaikh Abdul Qadir and Shaikh Musa—for their father's position came to Akbar's court for decision. Musa's political foresight gave him an edge over his brother and Abdul Qadir retired to live as an ascetic in Uch. Earlier Abdul Qadir had annoyed Akbar by declaring it was unlawful to consume poppy seeds or their oil; and on another occasion Fatehpur Sikri, after performing congregational prayers, he began his own supererogatory prayers in the *diwankhana* or audience hall. When ordered by Akbar to conduct his prayers in his own quarters, he answered pertly that in the realm of prayer the emperor's decrees were irrelevant. Akbar ordered him to leave; Abdul Qadir stormed from the hall and immediately resigned his *madad-i ma'ash*.³⁶ The succession controversy continued; in Uch and Multan, Abdul Qadir was recognized as his father's successor, while Musa was honoured in this role in Delhi. Musa remained loyal to Akbar and was also a friend of Abul Fazl and Faizi.³⁷

However, not all the meetings desired by Akbar materialized and he did not unilaterally impose his will. Shaikh Daud was a passionate Sufi who wandered in Multan and Punjab, and settled down later. Hearing of his fame from *darveshes* travelling in the Punjab, Abdul Qadir Badauni visited him at Shergarh, and wrote that every day fifty to 100 persons came to see him and were converted to Islam.³⁸ Though Badauni exaggerated the number, the miracles attributed to Daud did, it seems, prompt some Hindus and members of tribes living near Shergarh to embrace Islam. In 1573–74 Akbar sent Shahbaz Khan Kamboh, an orthodox Sunni, to invite Daud to his court. Daud refused, arguing that his secret prayers for the emperor were sufficient for his welfare.³⁹

Some of Akbar's associations escape the demands of political pragmatism. The pilgrim too could split from the royal arbiter. In 1561 Akbar, disguised as an ordinary citizen, secretly visited the crowd that had assembled en route to Bahraich to visit the tomb of the warrior saint Ghazi Salar Masud, better known as Ghazi Miyan.⁴⁰ At the festivities of Akbar's circumcision, Shah Birdi Bayat became an ascetic, resigned his military career, began to supply free water to the people under the name of Bahram Saqqa, and lived for a while in the precincts of the tomb of Nizamuddin Auliya. Akbar visited his *saqqa-khana* frequently as long as he was in Agra, to drink water and to listen to his poetry.⁴¹

Akbar visited the famous yogi Gosain Jadrup in 1601.⁴³ Jahangir continued to visit him and was eulogistic about him. Gosain's own response to the latter does not name Akbar, but has a retrospective resonance that seems to enfold Akbar:

In what language can I return thanks for this gift of Allah that I am engaged in the reign of such a just king in the worship of my own deity in ease and contentment, and that the dust of discomposure from any accident settles not on the spirit of my purpose?⁴⁴

Shaikh Badiuddin Saharanpuri, who claimed to have visited Gosain Jadrup, related that the Gosain had told him that the Mujaddid was superior to all other spiritual guides. However, when asked why he did not become the Mujaddid's disciple, he answered that being himself a prominent Hindu saint, he was far from needing the instruction of someone else.⁴⁵

When compared to the hagiographies, these encounters reveal a more variegated spectrum, and one more imbued with the pragmatism of the state. But, as is apparent, hagiographic codes too structure the events as well as the recording of these non-fictional encounters: the travelling fame of holy persons fans royal desire; the royal court is omniscient, the deeds and repute of all holy persons reaches its ears; royal munificence is offered and usually accepted; the king either himself travels to meet them or summons them to court. Akbar is an arbiter of succession disputes but not of holiness and, consequently there are no miracles—these latter two features seem to be more embedded in the structure of hagiographies.

It follows too, then, that conversion should be a more marked feature of the hagiographies. As displays of power, miracles are meant to convert—they can be directed not only at Brahmans, common people, or kings, but more subtly from a sect to another sect, from Sufis to other Sufis, from Sufis to their adversaries. At a formal level, 'conversion' of the king, whether as outright change in belief, or as patronage, or simply as acceptance, is part of a semantic of the conquest of worldly pleasure, a system of subduing worldly authority to spiritual authority, be it Vaishnava or Sufi.

The question of the social ground of the trope of conversion remains, particularly since it was a recurring motif in the practices of pirs, bhaktas, and saints.

III

The axes along which 'Akbar' could become a system of symbolic attributions may have been the re-narrativization of events, the orbits of charity, an eclectic court, new sources of legitimation 'below', synchronic 'non-family' or elective communities of saints, his own contradictory personal location, the links between royal self-projection and hagiographic notation, and the difficulty of classifying his beliefs. The section explores each one of these possibilities.

Obviously the non-fictional recorded encounters are themselves one such axis, and provide the bases for extension, elaboration, remodulation, and recombination in hagiographies.

Some encounters were later structured into hagiography. Akbar's meeting with the Zoroastrian teacher Dastur Meherji Rana became the subject of a popular story and many ballads in Gujarat. As the story goes, by force of magic a Brahman raised in the sky a metallic tray that resembled a second sun. Meherji Rana brought down the artificial sun by means of his prayers and incantations, and Akbar was much surprised by this miracle.⁴⁶

In another variant, a Hindu priest named Jagat Guru, deeply versed in magic and sorcery, once performed a miracle in the presence of the emperor and his court by sending up and suspending a large silver plate high in the sky, which looked like another sun shining in the heavens, and challenged the professors of all the religions assembled to take this new sun down and test the power of their faiths. Akbar called upon the ulama to do this and refute the Hindu, but they could not do it themselves. Hence, they went in anxious search of someone who could, and disgrace the infidel. They were told that a priest in Naosari could do it if he were called. At their suggestion, Akbar sent for him. He came, and by reciting prayers and other incantations, broke the power of the Hindu magic, and the false sun came down and fell at Akbar's feet. Akbar was astonished; the priest was received with awe. He expounded his faith to Akbar and convinced him so well as to make him a Parsi. This tradition circulated in various forms in prose and verse; some poems about this triumph of Meherji Rana continued to be sung by *khialis*, or itinerant minstrels, and others in Gujarat and Bombay.⁴⁶

A farman records Akbar's meeting with Udant Nath or pir Bhau Nath, the founder of the Jakhbar gaddi of Shaiva jogis of the Kanphata sect. Local narratives, however, go much further and claim that Akbar held the pir in deep reverence after he miraculously transported a *ber* tree from Mecca to satisfy the emperor's sudden craving.⁴⁷

The Mughal state continued the practice of several earlier states to institutionalize a relation with ascetic and holy men through charity. Like earlier states, it too felt bound to notice those who had eschewed its own premises of power and authority; giving them charity was a form of the state seeking its own legitimacy from those who ignored it, that is, recognizing alternate sources of social authority.

The state also classified, subtly arrogated the right to definition of worth as a precondition of its obligation to provide. The most important duty of the *sadr us-Sudur* was disbursement of state charities and grant of *madad-i ma'ash* to scholars and destitutes. According to Abul Fazl, the following four classes of people were considered worthy and in need of subsistence: those who had withdrawn from all worldly occupations and had made search after true knowledge the sole concern of their life; ascetics and hermits who had left the world to get rid of selfish desires and human passions; the poor and needy who did not even have the strength to busy themselves in search of knowledge; and men of noble birth who from ignorance and want of learning were deprived of the means of acquiring money.⁴⁸

Religion was no bar to the grants of *madad-i ma'ash* under the Mughals. Akbar made land grants to the influential jogis of Jakhbar, starting in 1571, which were confirmed by his successors. He also made a land grant to the Jangambari *math* at Benaras, which was confirmed by Aurangzeb in the early years of his reign, who at this time also gave other grants to non-Hindus.⁴⁹

The politics of acceptance and refusal of reward in hagiographies could perhaps be disentangled not only in relation to the state's idea of charity and to the rejection of the state by some sects, but also to the wider hierarchical underpinning of the idea of charity that was shared across denominational distinctions. The medieval period was conspicuous in lavish gifts and generosity. Charity on the part of social superiors towards inferiors was seen as a virtue by Hindus and Muslims. The belief prevailed that every gift of charity in this world would be rewarded ten times in value in the next. What is more, frugality displayed meanness of heart.⁵⁰

The patronage of the court extended from translation of Sanskrit into Persian to being a sanctuary for several heterodox or persecuted persons, including poets. Indeed, the heterodoxy of the court as a whole dispensed a more personalized and widely dispersed

patronage than the religious grants, and also provided after 1576 a space for religious debate in the increasingly cosmopolitan ibadat-khana or house of worship.

Some poets came to the Mughal court because they were persecuted in their homelands for their unorthodox religious views. For instance, Ghazali Mashadi who, according to Badauni, had spent his whole life in heresy and impiety, came from Iraq. Qasim-i Kahi was known for his catholicity and mixed freely with qalandars, mystics, and free-thinkers, and visited different places of worship, including Somnath. Another poet, Jafar Beg, was a member of Akbar's Tauhid-i-Ilahi.⁵¹ Some of Akbar's courtiers, Tansen, Man Singh, and Birbal (who liaise between him and saints in several hagiographic narratives), themselves patronized a variety of sects and figured independently in some hagiographies.⁵² The court's heterodoxy as a whole further diluted the thin discursive divide between the literary, the devotional, the performative, and, as is evident in the notation of Mira in the *Bhaktmal*, was itself played into an overlapping terrain. Damodar of Jhang, probably a contemporary, referred to Akbar's reign as presiding over the final reunion of Heer and Ranjha after their death in his quasi-mystical rendition of the *qissa*.⁵³

Akbar is simultaneously part of the existing royal practice of patronage of poets and saints—a classic feature of kingship and religious legitimation—and its culmination, but recast in a new mould, since he himself is presented as seeking legitimation primarily from popular worship rather than from Brahmins or the 'ulama.

Groups who entered the Indian subcontinent in the past had often indigenized on the Kshatriya model, sought and received Brahmanical legitimation, a process facilitated by the wide dispersal of Brahmanical groups who assisted in the reproduction of state and ruling group ideologies. Certain elements of indigenization on the Kshatriya model continued during the sultanate and Mughal rule, but that seems to have been politically insufficient.

By Akbar's time a social process—visible in roving and institutionalized devotional movements, often syncretic and locally influential—was already underway, which could provide other axes for the legitimation and reproduction of the state, making it possible for rulers to seek these in disparate modes of worship. This was a contingent, conjunctural phenomenon, it was neither reducible to political processes, nor did it run in tandem with them. Indeed, the composite ruling class of the mansabdari system never became powerful enough to form a separate force.⁵⁴ It was this phenomenon, combined with heterodoxy, that could interlock with a system of affiliation that may be called elective or non-family communities, and allow Akbar to become an 'imaginable' apex figure in a devotional constellation.

The very fictionality of the hagiographical encounters claimed with Akbar indicates perceived ideological affinities, affinities that are coded as meetings. In the genre, meetings were far more substantive than mere assertions of affinity. The idea of a non-family community seems to have been initiated by Namdev (1270–1350) as a company of *sants* who knew each other and saints of the past, cutting across linguistic and regional divisions, and unconstrained by the fact that no such meetings had taken place. This was continued by Eknath who constituted a living tradition of fifty *sants* based not on meetings, but on a knowledge of the stories of their lives.⁵⁵

The oral transmission of hagiographies across linguistic lines may have contributed to the growing power of the idea, as well as the itinerary of pilgrimages that not only took devotees outside their own linguistic regions, but produced a spatial catholicity that could become part of a single itinerary. If social practice contributed to the formal assemblage of linked hagiographies, these newly compendious hagiologies implied being born into webs of narratives and interlocution rather than into ascriptive primordialities.

The notion of a company of saints was abstract, yet provided a cluster of authority and mode of legitimation that may be related to the socially unprivileged and low-caste character of many devotional movements, which, though dissenting, did not lose their dependence on sanctions. Significantly, the presence of women saints was marginal. The sense of kinship or of being a clan among persons unconnected by any traceable historical lineage, and attached to sant panths, Vaishnava sampradays, and Sufi *silsilas* has been discussed by Daniel Gold.⁵⁶ In spiritual lineages, family trees could contain Muslims and disciples from various castes (*kunbi*, *banya*, *Kshatriya*, *Brahman*), regions, and occupations (cultivators, servants, landowners), with hierarchies that often moved upwards and maintained these distinctions in groups of worshippers. Lineages, thus, could contain a great deal of internal variety, local variation, and be diffused over various saints or many panths could exist in the name of a dead saint.⁵⁷ This speaks for an intricate social networking and geographical mobility which bypasses actual clans and lineages while using their structures.

These elective communities pre-dated Akbar and extended beyond him. A mid-seventeenth-century Mughal miniature showing saints and yogis with a group of Sufi saints and court familiars watching the ecstatic dance of Muslim mystics, set in the Ajmer dargah of Muinuddin Chishti at the annual *urs*, was probably painted under the patronage of Dara Shikoh. Chishtis were already closely identified with the Mughal dynasty. Many of the Sufis are identifiable personalities, long dead, and their presence in a contemporaneous scene suggests the concept of *silsila* or spiritual chain linking generations of Sufis back to Muhammed. The identifiable saints are fairly unorthodox: the cobbler Ravidas or Raidas, Pipa (c. 1335–1403) said to have been a raja who abdicated his sovereignty and distributed his wealth among the poor, Sena the barber, Namdev, Kabir, Kamal said to be son of Kabir, a Shaiva ascetic, Pir Machhander the legendary guru of Gorakhnath, Gorakhnath, Gosain Jadrup, Lal Swami, and one unidentifiable figure associated with Vaishnavism. The saints are roughly on the left and the yogis on the right at the bottom, above are Muslim saints, heads of Sufi orders, and in the middle ground there is dancing and chanting accompanied by music.⁵⁸

This crystallized notion of a composite, interactive community of holy men *across* historical time and space, that is, a *synchronic* community (in which Shaiva, Vaishnava, saints, Ramanand's disciples, and others interact with pirs) is significantly not a later liberal interpolation, but a contemporary seventeenth-century imagined or desired horizon. It may be worth remembering that the oral compositions and hagiographies of most of these personages were actually compiled, written, or systematized in this period. So the notions of wide-ranging religious affinity, of Hindu-Muslim kinship, and Hindu-Muslim animosity, *all* occupied the period of Aurangzeb.

Akbar could be one nodal point in the creation of a community of saints, both metaphorically and literally, as a patron. More significantly, the expansion of empire under him provided some of the material conditions conducive to such non-family bonding, since conquests also enlarged the avenues for mercantile activity, travel, pilgrimage, and regional interchange.

Akbar's personal location appears to be contradictory. Identifiable with the enlargement of royal pomp since the days of the sultanate, especially in the accumulation of palaces, wealth, and women, intensifying the conflation of kings with the principle of worldliness and inviting reform, he simultaneously carried a special plebeian, even artisanal aura compounded with an 'illiteracy'—to which could be ascribed the spontaneous, intuitive knowledge that subversively cut through the corruption of high textuality—celebrated since the early Sufis and Kabir.

This latter aura of plebeian accessibility attaches itself readily to the incidents recounted by Abul Fazl and others—Akbar visiting fairs in disguise, disfiguring his face with a squint when recognized, watching artisans at their craft, staying in peasant homes, eating at a common sarai run by a bhatiyari, wearing a lungi—and is also evident in the account of a contemporary Jesuit missionary, Du Jarric, who described Akbar's especial courtesy to men of the humbler classes; his being often seen 'shearing camels, hewing stones, cutting wood, or hammering iron and doing all with as much diligence as though engaged in his own particular vocation'. Du Jarric claimed 'that every man believed the prince was on his side'.⁵⁹

Again, in contradictory fashion, Akbar appears as the consenting subject of an official biographical divinization verging on hagiography and as consenting to a denominational unclassifiability that aroused the wrath of orthodox Muslims like Badauni.

Abul Fazl produced a comprehensive ideal of kingship, structured around the unusual dyad of the divine origin of sovereignty and the heterogenous nature of the king's subjects who followed a wide variety of religions. The host of virtues kings customarily possessed—magnanimity, benevolence, paternal love, justice, forgiveness, complete trust in God—were now accompanied by a king above religious differences, guided by reason, following the course of enquiry and avoiding blind authority (*taqlid*), adopting universal peace and toleration as the crux of his policy, and sulh-i kul or peace with all as the guiding principle of his government.⁶⁰

The king in this account is believer and sceptic, faithful and rational; this mixture of faith and enquiry is not only startlingly replicated in hagiographies, but even the spirit of enquiry is implicitly related to the presence of a large number of faiths that make blind authority undesirable.

In the *Ain-i Akbari* Abul Fazl's stated problematic was the friction between various religions in India. He attributed this partly to the barrier of linguistic diversity compounded by the insularity of the country from others and the persecution of earnest inquirers that prohibited dialogue. He gave a positive role to the state in ensuring security and making a space for dialogue—almost exactly what Akbar does even in the more aggressive hagiographies.

The posited relation here between a notion of kingship and the relation of the state to religious difference is substantiated in many of Akbar's recorded encounters with holy men and even more markedly in hagiographies. So vivid is the triangular relation, even mutuality, between discursive courtly ideal, royal practice, and a regionally disparate hagiographic horizon, that it is difficult to reduce this phenomenon to the exfoliation of an image of a benevolent state and emperor from 'above'. It may instead be a clue to the way the terms of the practices and self-projection of state and court are being restructured in relation to needs from 'below.' In other words, the heterodox tendencies in court and in popular culture may have been part of an interactive historical dynamic.

It seems that the personal divinization of Akbar was the only device available to Abul Fazl through which religions and politics could be made to cohere and to be ultimately subservient to the emperor—the highest court of appeal. He traces Akbar's political wisdom to divine revelations; his political authority is invested with spiritual leadership, and the dichotomy between religion and politics was to resolve itself before his all-embracing personality which looked after both the mundane and spiritual affairs of society. Akbar is imagined as an emperor prophet. The first chapter of the *Akbarnama* describes the 'holy manifestations' preceding his birth, reads like a popular traditional superstitious account of the birth of prophets, and is hardly consonant with Abul Fazl's own critique of the irrational approach of the ulama. Light shines from the brows of Akbar's pregnant mother,

light enters the bosom of the nurse: Akbar even remembers everything from the time he was one year old.⁶¹

However, Akbar virtually co-authored the *Akbarnama*. Not only did he take a keen personal interest in its day-to-day progress to see how his biography was being presented, but Abul Fazl's scheme of glorification agreed in all details with his own ambitions.⁶² If Akbar was part-creator of his own official image, then the *Akbarnama* occupies an intersection between hagiography, biography, and autobiography, giving an uncanny dimension to the continuum between Akbar, the court, some contemporary perceptions, and hagiographic inscription—almost as if Akbar is actually being seen, at least by some, the way he wanted himself to be seen.

How did this willing subject of hagiography enter the hagiographies of others? Does the aura of divinity, that makes him a preceptor in his own right, make him less of a king and more of an equal? Is he not merely a king, but himself the architect of a creed and a preceptor in contest with other preceptors? It is evident, at least from the interpolation in *Dadu Janma Lila*, that the divinization of Akbar produced some resistance too, and could have been related to the use of miracles to impress him, though to some extent these are structural to hagiographies. Did the divinization of sovereignty, involving as it does a system of attributes that imply reciprocity between divine objects and believers, and a semiotic that cuts across boundaries of region and religion, facilitate Akbar's absorption into hagiographies as primarily a benevolent ruler?

In practice, Akbar's divinization was simultaneously fleshed out and undercut by its content, a content that cannot be identified with any single religion and was closer to the refusals in sant traditions. Akbar seems to have fostered the image of inoffensive controlled scepticism and unclassifiability. He seems to have repeated the claim of being neither Muslim nor Hindu that resonated in the north for several centuries from Kabir to Dadu Dayal to Bulhe Shah: 'I am neither in the ranks of unbelievers nor of *musalmans*. I am neither fit for hell nor heaven. What am I to do?'⁶³ This very ambiguity may have multiplied the range of religious sites he was made to occupy.

Echoing Akbar's contemporaries, historians from the eighteenth century to the present have debated, from different stances, whether he was a Muslim, whether his eclecticism amounted to deviation from or confirmation of the fundamentals of Islam, whether he was anti-Islamic, and whether he was a believer. This debate seems to assume that denominational classification and religious boundaries were stable, impermeable to historical change, and ignores the pressure for alternate spaces that had come into being. While varieties of 'unbelief' and changes in religious practice are accepted, these are believed to have no effect on the *definition* of religions.

It may be more rewarding to see the cooperative and contradictory play between hagiographies and the court as part of an ongoing social process. The interrelated heterodox tendencies in court and in devotional movements show that there was a conscious and far-reaching contest over defining a more denominationally defiant and flexible third space critical of established religions. This space was widening at many social levels ranging from popular devotion, the cosmopolitan court of Akbar (with its comparativist, innovative, and intellectual bent) that interacted with those 'below' through patronage, to a 'symbolic' social potential around which popular versions of Akbar were knit. Devotional movements faced difficulties in consolidating this space. If some political and economic changes abetted it, other elite and class interests resisted it.

This space also seems to have a complicated relation to previous Puranic and early medieval forms of eclecticism, and to earlier eclectic forms of royal patronage. Both

had assisted its unfolding, but at the same time continuously reabsorbed it into existing power hierarchies. Possibly that was why, over time, the relation to royal or established power was shaped around a dyad of contest with and an incorporation of saints, till it became an established hagiographical trope. The nature of the space itself was pre-eminently one that resisted ready denominational classification or identity—a tendency, as is evident in hagiographies, that ran counter to a contrary existing tendency of direct recourse to or incorporation into recognized or sanctioned Brahmanical and Islamic models.

IV

Akbar was not only the (willing) object of a series of failed classifications, but also of partly successful or failed conversions from above and below—and these too were linked to questions of classification. He was the object of conversion for three organized religious groups—Jains, Zoroastrians, and Jesuit missionaries: All three were, interestingly, trading groups and direct beneficiaries.

Akbar entertained and held discussions with Zoroastrian scholars, accepted fire worship and Parsi festivals.⁶⁴ He gave a land grant to the Parsi religious leader, Meherji Rana, resident of Naosari, Gujarat, who visited the court and explained the tenets of his religion. His son Kaiqubad also received a grant from Akbar.⁶⁵ Later traditions read these as signs of conversion.

Traditional Gujarati songs suggest that Meherji converted Akbar by investing him with *sudrah* (the sacred shirt) and *kusti* (the sacred thread girdle), outward signs of having adopted that faith.⁶⁶ The *khial* begins:

*Meherji Rana was a very virtuous man.
He was a perfect servant of god.
King Akbar put on the sudrah.
Look to the display of the Zoroaster religion.*⁶⁷

These mutations may have taken place in the late eighteenth century. A manuscript dated 1792, written for a well-known merchant of Bombay, Behdin Jamshedji Kukaji, by Mobad Bahram, carries a praise song of the dastur and Akbar said to be authored by the celebrated Tansen.⁶⁸

Akbar entertained and engaged Jain monks in prolonged debates in the ibadat-khana. According to contemporary Svetambar Jain accounts, they were a persuasive influence. He became an object of Jain *prashasti* and panegyrics. His court was a place for upward mobility in administrative posts for some Jains too, while the encouraging reception of Jain ascetics also ensured support of prosperous Jains.⁶⁹

Three great Jain teachers are recorded as having visited the court of Akbar—Hiravijaya Suri, Vijaysen Suri, and Bhanuchandra. It was later claimed that Akbar forbade animal slaughter under Jain influence for twelve days during the holy Paryushana festival in six provinces of India where they were in residence.⁷⁰ He conferred by special farman a number of hills, temples, and pilgrimage spots on Hiravijaya Suri.⁷¹

It seems Akbar was also interested in Jain philosophy, especially in adopting partial vegetarianism. He appreciated the doctrine that karma or human action and not God was the cause of human happiness and unhappiness, and more or less accepted ahimsa. In the course of his conversations with Jains, he began to question the validity of Islamic tenets of

revelation, resurrection, and the day of judgement. Jain tenets of karma, moksha, and ahimsa were debated vis-à-vis both Islamic and Brahmanical tenets.⁷²

The European encounter has its own interest. In his negotiations with the Portuguese, Akbar came across Jesuit missionaries. He invited Jesuits from Goa to his court at Fatehpur Sikri. This led to an enthusiasm on their part for converting him—it would be a victory for the church since large numbers could then be converted. According to the accounts of these Jesuits, he showed respect for the Bible and they felt that his interest in knowing about the Trinity and the incarnation of God as Christ was a sign of real interest in the Christian faith; but they were disturbed because his mental disposition did not seem right for conversion, nor did his polygamy—he seemed to them to lack interest in changing his way of life. They decided to persevere since he was well disposed to the missionaries and had abandoned Islam.⁷³ Attachment to polygamy was construed as an obstacle to conversion, while Akbar's curiosity and long discussions were read as readiness to convert.⁷⁴

One missionary, Acquaviva, put these difficulties into the discourse of pragmatism and ambiguity. He categorically affirmed that the conversion of Akbar was impossible. Some would say he was a Hindu, others that he was a Muslim. He adds that the emperor conformed himself to all to win the goodwill of all. He was neither a Christian, nor a Hindu, nor a Muslim.⁷⁵ But he thought that it might help if the Pope himself wrote to Akbar. Pope Gregory XIII did write in 1582 saying that there should not be great delay in taking the bold step since 'this movement of spirit' came to Akbar from God. He asked Akbar to compare the worth of his soul and the salvation promised by Christ against the kingdom, power, sons, subjects, and wealth he possessed as the ruler, and suggested that all these were worth nothing compared with the dignity of his soul, and

an everlasting kingdom compared with one of short duration, perishable and subject to many contingencies; transform your mortal power into undying bliss; prepare for yourself a new family and treasures in heaven. God will perhaps grant you that, if it be expedient for your salvation, you enjoy also this earthly kingdom.

He suggested that if it were God's will, Akbar could continue holding the reins of the kingdom even after conversion to Christianity.⁷⁶

Acquaviva noticed changes in Akbar—homage to the sun and moon, partial abstinence from meat, patronizing Parsi festivals. This mix of the Hindu, Jain, and Zoroastrian confused Acquaviva, who was unable to understand him or his continuing friendliness. He claimed that Akbar had himself admitted to him that he 'was so bewildered as to be unable to establish the truth'.⁷⁷ He felt that Akbar's motives for cherishing friendship with Europeans were other than the religious.

In 1590 Akbar celebrated the feast of the assumption of the blessed virgin Mary and her picture was put up for public veneration. The Jesuits felt he had finally renounced Islam, and one of them even reported that he had given all his wives but one in marriage to various nobles. Akbar performed the same celebration in 1595 for another set of missionaries and asked them to establish a church in Lahore. These missionaries too attributed pragmatic motives to Akbar; and Akbar did indeed have political motives.⁷⁸

The particular Jesuit father who was in the court on Akbar's death said: 'He died as he had lived; for, as none know what law he followed in his lifetime, so none knew in which he had died.'⁷⁹ According to another Jesuit missionary's observation:⁸⁰

The emperor is not a Muhammedan but is doubtful as to all forms of faith and holds firmly that there is no divinely accredited form of faith, because he finds in all something to offend

his reason and intelligence. . . . At the court some say that he is a heathen. . . . Others that he is a Christian. Others that he intends to found a new sect. Among the people there are various opinions regarding the emperor; some holding him to be a Christian, others a heathen, others a Muhammedan. The more intelligent, however, consider him to be neither Christian nor heathen nor Muhammedan, and holds it to be the truest. Or they think him to be a Muhammedan who outwardly conforms to all religions in order to obtain popularity.

Another equally confused Jesuit father, Xavier, eventually resolved his dilemma by characterizing Akbar as 'a philosopher in search of truth'.⁸¹

The Jesuits worked on the assumption that Akbar could belong to only one or the other religion. In this logic tolerance or eclecticism becomes deceit or dissimulation, the patina for an undisturbed core of the true belief lying beneath. The unclassifiable is more troubling for Jesuits than for most other religious groups, who seem content that Akbar had accepted *some* of their tenets or practices. If an idea of tolerance took the shape of partial conversion, then within it the freedom of every religion could also appear to impinge on the boundaries of all religions. This was indeed the Jesuit position. As Monserrate put it, Akbar's toleration of all religions in reality violated the law of all religions.⁸²

Akbar himself seemed untroubled by the wider possibilities of conversion. The Christian missionaries whom he repeatedly invited to the court received freedom to worship, to make converts, to construct churches, and were given land and cash.⁸³ Obviously, the relation between the state and religions was complex—royal eclecticism could serve many purposes while the close relation between mercantile interests and religious groups raises a host of questions. Neither of these can, however, be reduced to pragmatism alone. The fact that Akbar allows Jesuits to convert anyone they wished shows an easy acceptance, a lack of fear of conversion, and an understanding that conversions are not unilateral but can come from many directions, while his own practice indicates that they need not even be complete.

This opens into other questions. One is the hint here of a deep and wide-ranging comparativism on pre-orientalist principles in which no religion seems to have been the first principle from which to evaluate others. The second is the crystallization of profound departures from Puranic and pre-medieval processes of religious choice and selection. The third is that 'partial conversions' may provide a better analytical tool for thinking about processes of assimilation and syncretism.

V

Akbar's unclassifiability was a source of palpable discomfort for Jesuit missionaries. Two Vaishnava hagiologies faced with the same difficulty resolved it differently through multifaceted gestures of inclusion and exclusion, which describe some of the trajectories of 'partial' conversion. The question of denominational identity was particularly vexing for Vaishnavas since Vaishnavism had been a site of prolonged Hindu-Muslim interaction in Maharashtra, Awadh, Bengal, and Gujarat. Avatars figured as an axis of mutual incorporation and many 'Muslims' like Abdur Rahim Khan-i Khanan, Bairam Khan's son, wrote Vaishnava poetry. A number of the translations from Sanskrit into Persian commissioned by Akbar were of Vaishnava texts.⁸⁴ There is also an unsubstantiated story of Akbar visiting the Krishna temple built by Man Singh in Brindavan with Akbar's permission.⁸⁵

Several Muslims were converted to Vaishnavism. According to Mahmud Balkhi, a Central Asian who travelled in India in 1624–25 during Jahangir's reign, Vaishnava practices

in Mathura at the Krishna temple built by Raja Man Singh were so attractive that it seemed worth conversion. He wrote in his *Bahr ul-Asrar*.⁸⁶

Beaming with joy, men and women, without shame mixing together but committing no impropriety, try to outdo each other in performing their rites, *rasoi* and all their false prayers. In the meantime a few thousand pleasure-seekers assemble at the other side of the bank of the river with the object of witnessing the scene, obtain a sight thereof. Such a sense-enticing sight is obtained that one might lose the rein of Islam and become a follower of the Hindus! Verily, from the heresy of the faces, figures and features of these modest blossoming-faced [women], it is no wonder that one's faith may be shaken and the glass of shame broken by stone; all self-control disappears.

He describes twenty-three Muslim bairagis in Benaras who converted because they fell in love en masse:⁸⁷

I saw a concourse of beautiful women, perfectly decorated and ornamented.

One of the strange affairs of that place that I witnessed was that twenty-three Muslims fell captive to their charms. Having fallen in love they had deserted their religion and accepted their creed.

For some time I held the company of them and questioned them about their mistaken way. They pointed towards the sky and put their fingers to their foreheads. By this gesture I understood that they attributed it to Providence and fate.

The concept of *karma* plays an ambivalent role in relation to religious difference in some Vaishnava texts. In the *Chaurasi Vaisnavan ki Varta* hagiography of Surdas, Akbar is endowed with wisdom and discrimination. The commentator, Hariray, finds it necessary to explain the fact that a Muslim such as Akbar should be sufficiently perspicacious to be able to appreciate Sur's spiritual qualities:⁸⁸

So the emperor Akbar was endowed with discrimination. How so? He had become a non-Hindu [*mlecch*] through a transgression of correct ritual practice; in his previous birth he had been a Hindu celibate [*brahmachari*] by the name of Balmukund, and one day when he drank unfiltered milk a cow's hair entered his stomach. And because of that transgression he became a *mlecch* in his next birth.⁸⁹

This is a very complex gesture of inclusion and exclusion. At one level karma leads to a weaving in and out of Hindu, Muslim, and other births, giving the soul a complicated and varied social trajectory. A Hindu reborn as a Muslim never quite loses all his Hindu-ness, which seems to cling in the next birth: Akbar remains a benevolent appreciator of Vaishnavas. But arguably, if Hindu-ness is not fully lost in a Muslim birth, then Muslims are affines at a very deep level indeed. At a popular, rather than philosophical, level karma and past Hindu birth becomes a way of accommodating Muslims as friends, benefactors, patrons. 'Good' Muslims like Akbar can be partially incorporated by virtue of having been Hindus in earlier lives. The minuteness of Akbar's sin in his past birth is itself remarkable—a completely unwitting transgression of ritual.

Did the need to explain through karma arise because a Mughal patron of heterodoxy could not be appreciated except through assimilation? Or because cross-religious devotional cults were common enough, but so were the realities of power and concomitant othering—and karma could provide a handy explanatory framework for both? Karma could become an assimilative form of conversion that permitted othering.

William Crooke cites another version, presumably popular in the nineteenth century, but now unconnected to any saint:

The emperor Akbar was in a former life a brahmin named Mukunda, who carried out a course of austerities in order to induce Siva to make him an emperor. Siva refused to grant his prayer, but advised him to [commit] suicide at Prayag or Allahabad as a punishment for his overweening ambition. Mukunda agreed on condition that he might remember in a future birth the events of his present life. Siva agreed and Mukunda was allowed to record his memoirs on a copper plate and bury it at the sacred river Jumna. Years after he was reborn in the womb of Hamida, mother of Akbar, who, when he ascended the throne, went to Prayag and dug up the plate, with the tongs, gourd, deerskins, and other properties which Mukunda as an ascetic used.⁸⁸

Akbar is given the previous birth of an ascetic but unnaturally ambitious Brahman. In what appears to be a decisive shift from oral to print transmission and textuality, this past birth is memorialized in writing that survives as archaeological/'historical' evidence subject to retrieval through proper excavation.

The device of karma seems to allow a method of genealogizing that is both parallel and tangential to earlier elite Rajput or Muslim royal genealogies. In this method, as old as the *Jatakas*, the previous births of an individual rather than the history of a family, group, or dynasty were traced. Here it seems to have become a way of mediating contemporary contradictions in systems of power and the identification of individuals. Akbar discovers his karmic lineage as a 'fallen' Brahman at the moment of his ascent to kingship. Karma is at once a principle of differentiation and of connection.

Akbar's narrative 'fate' seems to be a cross-hatch of that of Raskhan, traditionally identified as a Pathan named Saiyid Ibrahim from Pihani in Hardoi district, who became a Vaishnava bhakta of Viṭthalnath and probably lived in the second half of the sixteenth century, as described in the Vaishnava Pushtimarg hagiology *Do Sau Bavan Vaishnavan ki Varta*, with that of a Khatri disciple of Vallabhacharya described in *Chaurav Vaishnavan ki Varta*. In the latter, the wife of a devotee from Kannauj named Damodardas Sambhalvare, anxious as to the outcome of her pregnancy—itselt granted as a boon by Vallabhacharya—consulted a woman with special powers to discover the sex of her child. Because of the sectarian insistence on the importance of single-minded faithfulness in devotion to the chosen guru, such a consultation constituted the sin of *anyavay*, or resort to another authority, and was punished by Vallabhacharya, who declared that the child would be born a mleccch—here synonymous with Muslim. The child's mother, once aware that she carried a mleccch in her womb, desisted from service to the deity, and when the child was born he was disowned to be reared by a wet nurse.⁸⁹ The *Bhavaprakash* commentary, anxious to distance the pious parents from the uncleanness of their child, adds that the boy did not actually become a mleccch until reaching the age of ten.⁹⁰

This amazing slippage between caste as an effect of birth and the loss of caste as part of punitive othering exceeds even the machinery of karma. Normally, a sinner would be born in the next birth as a woman or mleccch or Shudra, and so belong to the appropriate family. Here, in order to punish the mother, the son of a Hindu family is born a Muslim. This bears the potential of seriously disrupting the entire notion of ritual order, caste, and community—anyone can give birth to anyone.⁹¹ The punishment is deeply ambivalent both in its social consequences and by virtue of the parental connection between Hindu and Muslim. A sense of such social and affinal connections also come out in the way that *Do Sau Bavan Vaishnavan ki Varta* refers to Muslims as *bari jati*, in fact Shrinathji (Krishna) himself, the mere sight of whose image has turned Raskhan's heart and produced fervent *gopi bhav* for his *mahlab*, speaks of Raskhan as a 'divine soul who has been born in the *bari jati*'.⁹² Perhaps othering was not always a unilateral process, but accompanied by assimilation,

conversion, and other mutually binding identities—only then could being a Muslim be figured consecutively as a punitive fate and as the object of Krishna's compassion, camaraderie, and ready acceptance. The *Bhavaaprakash* commentary of Hariray may have been trying to flatten this ambivalence by putting the age of Damodar's son becoming a *mlecch* at ten (implying circumcision?), otherwise how and when would a child of Hindu parentage be singled out as a Muslim? The word of an angry, patriarchal guru was insufficient by itself to mark the child.

Having inherited an apocalyptic view of conversion from the stark oppositions set up between Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity in colonial and communal historiography, we forget that conversion was embedded in a variety of social relations and a continuous feature of the history of the subcontinent—Buddhist, Jain, Roman Catholic, Sunni, Shaiva, Vaishnava, Shakta, Sufi, Bhakti—there was no dearth of proselytizers or of persuasion.

There were instances, as yet underexplored, of conversion to Islam and reversion of Rajputs and Brahmans in several regions, some of which may have been related to the attempt to retighten caste boundaries loosened by Islam in this period. In medieval Bengal it was said that a Brahman could be taken back for 'the fire of Brahmanical spirit burns in a Brahman up to six generations'.⁹⁵ *Bhaktavijaya* tells the story of Bahiram Bhatt, a Brahman who converted to Islam and then reverted, a process which left him for a while in grave doubt about his identity and the conviction that he was neither.

The Siyal clan of Jhang district had a tradition that their founder was converted by Baba Farid. Richard Eaton's count of masculine given names in genealogical charts of twenty generations stretching from the early thirteenth century, in which the founder lived, to the nineteenth century, in which the charts were gathered into a book, reveals a remarkably slow shift in the occurrence of Muslim names. Until the end of the fourteenth century only Punjabi secular names appear; in the mid-seventeenth century there are as many Muslim names as Punjabi ones. Punjabi secular names disappear totally only by the early nineteenth century.⁹⁶ Was this gradualness of conversion alone or also a tardiness in changing names?

Evidently, till the seventeenth century, conversion, conventionally defined as a sudden shift from one belief system to another, took place across a continuum. It could be enacted through the force and violence that inhered in war and enslavement; or enacted through punitive discriminatory laws (not unlike the practised discriminations based on caste); or be a response to persecution (as in the case of Buddhism). It could occupy pragmatic locales among men of ruling groups and their marriage alliances, and be a facet of lower-caste/class upward mobility. It could be allied with state power or be separate from it. It could be 'unreasonable' as in marriages for love. Or it could be the result of reasoned choice and religious debate—as in the comparativist vocabulary of Eknath, Kabir, Dadu, and Nanak in which religious practices were compared, contrasted, sifted, praised, condemned, and which consciously sculpted a medium for discussing tension, underplaying origins, and upholding their own choices. Conversion was also tied to illumination—the sudden eruption of a new faith through miracles, sight of a holy person, teaching of preceptors, leading to an 'awakening' or immediate transformation.⁹⁷ Finally, conversion was often interleaved in individual trajectories of eclectic experimentation, moving from faith to faith through the pathways of intellectual curiosity, spiritual quest, theological attraction, personal friendship, or dialogue.

If conversion is also less conventionally defined as including 'partial conversion'—that is, as a qualitative, relational reconfiguration of belief systems that was not necessarily instant or dramatic or finalist, but involved alterations in faith and many boundary-cross-

ing, boundary-effacing transactions, in which the multiple modalities of conversion were not mutually exclusive but could occur severally—then at least two other prolonged and subtler historical processes become available for mapping subcontinental belief systems. The first is the adoption of selected tenets, popular local cult, godlings, fakirs, yogis, festivals, rituals, or everyday practices that involved partial acceptance of the new and/or partial rejection of the old, some degree of change in belief systems, and at times gave rise to new cults. Such conscious or reasoned selection from and persuasion by different religions must surely have remodulated their interfaces and boundaries. The second is, the less self-conscious process of gradual assimilation, permeation, diffusion, accretion, through social interaction, contiguity, or absorption into Brahmanical Hinduism and Islam that attended on vast changes such as the shift to settled agriculture, the expansions in production, trade,³⁰ travel, and settlement. Both processes were seldom entirely unilateral, and produced interaction and layering of cosmologies, theologies, monotheisms, mysticisms, guru-centred cults, and modes of worship, and, within the combative self-making of sects, created fresh interfaces, compatibilities, or links between sects, inventive modes of incorporation, substitution, overlaying, interweaving, adaptation, domestication, re-semanticization, and re-manifestation of deities, icons, concepts, and practices. They produced not only defined syncretisms, but also ambiguous or doubled identities.

In both the conventional and the less conventional meaning of conversion, changes in belief were seldom coterminous with a thoroughgoing transformation in names, dress, bodily practices, rites of access and passage, or social identity. Some boundaries took generations to cross and some were never crossed. Both temporalities of conversion—as instant and as gradual processes—thus have produced ‘unfinished’ conversion and consequently new overlapping networks. Even temporary conversion and shallow or pragmatic adhesion seem to leave a residue. Finally, the techniques of disavowal or renunciation of a faith, whether atheistic or agnostic, or as a preamble to the choice of another faith, also carved significant pathways in and out of belief systems.

Given the manifold nuances in the alteration of belief, the variations in composite faiths, the continuities beneath partial shifts in belief systems, the multiple agencies and processes involved, and the range of temporal transactions differing in duration, intensity, and extent, one may question the adequacy of conversion as a concept altogether, or even challenge my own expansion of the term to cover what were indeed variegated and specific processes. Until a new and more precise vocabulary becomes available, a working notion of partial conversion has the advantage of encapsulating and opening these processes to more nuanced analyses, as well as of suggesting that conversion could signal as much a discourse of *relationality*, *connectedness*, and *bonding* as of a prickly or combative *antagonism*. After all, conversion in all its variety also represented the *porous boundary* between sects and denominations, the difficulty of absolutizing religious difference, and was often an inadvertent mechanism for the production of cohering diversities.

As such partial conversion may also offer a more useful way of thinking about syncretism, both from the point of view of understanding its persistence, for showing up the hiatus between official or orthodox classification and social practices, and the repeated threat it has posed over time to various absolutisms at different conjunctures. For instance, partial conversion was opposed and subject to ‘purification’ even before forcible conversion to Islam became an issue. The twelfth-century Agamic Shaiva text *Somavamsipaddhati* prescribed a conversion rite from Buddhism, Jainism, Vaishnavism, Sankhya, and so on to Shaivism. The rite, regardless of which of these the devotee hitherto belonged to, removed the mark imprinted by an inferior or alien religion or philosophical system in the soul of

the convert: removed all former religious obligation and all the merit acquired so far by the converttee. The adept had to start from full erasure, or from zero, or like a newborn child.⁹⁹ Partial conversion thus bred not only fecund confusion but also icy clarities, and was itself a terrain of contest, even eradication.

VI

As it must be evident by now, several elements from this webbed terrain of sought fixities and practised fluidities clustered around Akbar. What is more, Akbar regretfully admitted having forced many persons to convert to Islam early in his life.¹⁰⁰ However, in 1562 he abolished the enslavement of families of captives as well as allowed those forcibly converted to return to their former faith.¹⁰¹ Apostasy in this sense ceased to be a crime. Akbar's official permission resonated with or ratified existing practices 'below' of moving back and forth. Significantly, Badauni accused Akbar of being over-influenced by his Hindu wives and practising their rituals; in fact Akbar conducted the marriages of his sons to Rajput princesses through both Hindu and Muslim ceremonies.¹⁰² Evidently, inter-religious marriage did not always entail conversion of wives to Islam.

It was also through this other series of attributions—the abolition of forcible conversion, modification of punitive or discriminatory laws, making a space for choice in the legalization of the reversion of converts, the nuances of partial conversion by wives, and others—that 'Akbar' could be made to represent a space for personal choice of a combinatoire. And since his own choosing, combining, and selecting from different religions happened without any official change of primordial denomination and without interrupting self-identification, it was possible to pull his syncretic practices into the mobile transactions of partial conversion. The accretion of visible marks and/or practices of many religions were attributed, howsoever temporarily, to Akbar: vegetarianism, tilak, rakhi, wearing a Roman Catholic relic and an image of the Virgin Mary, the Parsi sudrah and kusti, and jewelled strings on his wrists tied by Brahmans.¹⁰³ Svetambar Jain, Parsi, and Dadupanthi narratives believe that their tenets were incorporated in Akbar's *Tauhid-i Ilahi*.

The fact that not all conversions were either finalist, or relied on binary definitions (such as Hindu or Muslim), or presented a very clear definition of what a person was being converted from or what the teleology of conversion would be can be glimpsed in the hagiographies. In none of them, with the exception of *Chaurasi Vaishnavan ki Varta*, is Akbar set up as a Muslim to be converted. He is the king who comes to worship Dadu or Tulsi or Krishna. The hagiographies seem to settle for instant persuasion or expansion in belief and do not reflect on either long-term duration or consequences. The Parsis made no attempt to reconcile Akbar's Parsi-ness with the signs of other faiths that he displayed.

The logics of partial conversion could configure one's 'own' religion as mobile, changing, as something that could be adopted by others in a segmented way. Eclecticism and tolerance accrued to partial conversion *from* positions of faith and could involve holding in abeyance, deferring, or loosening denominational identity. One person's 'full' truth could be another person's partial truth.

The apparent satisfaction of Jains and Parsis with the fact that parts of their 'truth' had been incorporated, that is, with the partial conversion of Akbar, suggests not only that in practice even 'full' conversions may not always have been thoroughgoing,¹⁰⁴ but that the pressures to make them so may not always have been uniform or strident. Partial conversion

thus did not have to be mere pragmatism, hypocrisy, something that was superficial, extraneous, or on the surface. In a situation where no unified 'Hindu' formation existed and where religious sects were constituted through and produced overlaps, then even so-called complete conversions may often have signified simply occupying another space within networks of related faiths.

In sum, the ground reality and dailiness of proselytization and conversion also provided a space from which Akbar could be appropriated in the hagiographies and in Jain or Parsi accounts. In this sense he is the royal, even imperial, crystallization of social practices and processes that exist before and after his time. Akbar is not the solitary object of conversion, he is a bit player in the wider, diffuse dramas of hagiography.

VII

Little that Akbar did was new. There were plenty of non-sharia elements, tensions between the ulama and rulers during the sultanate, and in some courts heterodox saints were welcomed. Rajput and other rulers also showed eclectic patterns of patronage. But these now come into a unique combination with a new centralized, patrimonial empire ruled by a king with personal authority; a king who as gift-giver, benevolent paternal figure, devotee, preceptor, personalizes this centralized empire; a court that is a sanctuary for heterodox exiles and institutionalizes the protection of holy men; an ongoing social process of religious 'comparativism' and syncretism from positions of belief and devotion (often unitarian of the one God with many names) that are both individual and institutionalized; conversion as part of multiple types of propagation; a series of attributions to Akbar of positions of assimilation, doubt, or unclassifiability which he seems either to have himself assisted or left unchallenged. (Significantly, Akbar is never represented as without any faith in divinity). This system of attributions came from many directions—his orthodox detractors, his loyal biographer, foreign Jesuits, and so on dash became an objective aura, and facilitated specific types of recuperation that were in turn tied to wider social processes. In sum, 'Akbar' was a conjunctural phenomena.

Because the tension between religious elites and kings on the issue of religious authority was familiar, Akbar could be pulled into hagiographic discourse from a number of directions. The sheer number of directions, however, may be related to the emergence of a centralized state formation. Existing sects, denominations, pirs, saints, and bhaktas who represented popular worship felt they had a claim to him. This wide dispersal and proliferation of the claim was unprecedented. In addition, because conversions were a part of social practice, Akbar could be pulled into it in ways both real and imaginary. Every sect, Vaishnava, sant, Sufi, jogi could be a proselytizer and display their symbolic agency in converting Akbar.

Mughal rule was not homogeneous regarding religion, law, custom, language, and culture; there were no fixed continuous policies regarding these. The dialectic of a flexible yet centralized state formation accompanied by personal authority and cultural heterogeneity informs the hagiographic appropriation of Akbar. Even if the ambiguity of some of these was linked to aggression or combative conversion, each claim from below was itself some form of incorporation or conversion.

The popular conversions of Akbar attest to a process of mutual legitimation of high and low. If the state was seeking legitimation in new structures and a 'composite' ruling class, new groups seem to have acquired a stake in that state. The Akbari mode of legitima-

tion rested in part on seeking boons from popular worship. Popular narrative notations in turn plebeianized the king and legitimated the state; they were a non-elite source of legitimation that metaphorically made many lower groups sharers in the state. Perhaps these narratives indicate that it was not ruling groups alone who had a stake in the state.

Akbar was villainized in other, especially political and puritanical, discourses, but not in devotional hagiographies. And the generic discursive constraints of hagiographies that governed how Akbar would or would not be represented, too emerged from specific social, political, and religious configurations. If the oral traditions from which these hagiographies crystallized are an eloquent articulation of those consensualities, those social bases, which are silent in written historical records, then social history must begin to take them into account.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This essay is abridged from 'Tracking Akbar: Hagiographies, Popular Narrative Traditions and the Subject of Conversion'; ed. N. Chandhoke, *Mapping Histories*, Delhi, Tulika, 2000.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Cited, Iqtidar Alam Khan, 'Seventeenth Century Assessment of Akbar', seminar paper on 'Akbar and his Age', Indian Council for Historical Research, Delhi, 1992, pp. 12–13.
- 2 Nabhadas' text is carried in Narendra Jha, *Bhaktmal: Pathanushilan Evam Vivechan* (Patna: Anupam Prakashan, 1978), pp. 32, 40. Privadas is cited in Mahavir Singh Gehlot, *Mira Jivni aur Kavya* (Allahabad: Shakti Kavvalava, 1945), p. 40.
- Raghavdas' *Bhaktmal* (1720) with a *tika* by Chaturdas (1800) is fairly similar: *Raghavdas Krit Bhaktmal* (Jodhpur: Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, n.d.), p. 100.
- 3 Winand M. Callewaert, *The Hindi Biography of Dadu Dayal*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), pp. 21, 31.
- 4 Ibid., p. 101.
- 5 Ibid., p. 102.
- 6 Ibid., p. 103.
- 7 Ibid., p. 103.
- 8 Ibid., pp. 103–4.
- 9 The narrative acquired a Hindu cast in some later hagiographies and Dadu (who lived from c. 1544 to 1603) acquired the reputation of persuading Akbar to ban cow slaughter. *Raghavdas Krit Bhaktmal*, p. 188.
- 10 Justin Abbott and N.R. Godbole (eds), *Stories of Indian Saints* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1933 [4th edition], 1988 [reprint]), part II, pp. 47–8.
- 11 Rupert Snell, 'Raskhan the Neophyte: Hindu Perspectives on a Muslim Vaisnav', in Christopher Shackle (ed.), *Urdu and Muslim South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 30.
- 12 *Chaurasi Vaishnavan ki Varta* (edited by D. Parikh) (Mathura, n.p., 1970) in Snell, 'Raskhan the Neophyte', p. 31. According to Snell, if Muslims were seen as outsiders and threats to the sect in *Chaurasi Vaishnavan ki Varta*, then so were other groups such as Shaivites, some other Vaisnavite sects, and non-Pushtimargis (p. 36).
- 13 In another version of the *Varta*, hearing of *Sursagar*, Akbar wonders how he can arrange a meeting with Surdas. The meeting occurs because God wishes it. Akbar tells Surdas that God has granted him the kingdom and all virtuous men sing his praise. He asks the poet twice to sing his praise. Both times Surdas sings only of Krishna. Akbar realizes that Surdas is free from greed and is a man of God. When Surdas does not answer Akbar's questions about how a blind man uses such metaphors, Akbar says Sur's eyes are in God's keeping and he sees through them. He wants to reward Sur, but does not make the attempt because Sur is so evidently uninterested in worldly things. *Chaurasi Vaishnavan ki Varta* (Bombay: Lakshmi Venkateshwara Chhapekhana, samvat 1978), pp. 288–91.

Akbar's encounter with Kumbhandas in this version of the *Varta* is more abrasive. As the fame of Kumbhandas' compositions spreads, a musician sings them for the ruler at Fatehpur Sikri. The ruler (*desadhipati*) sends for this *mahapurush*. Kumbhandas rejects the palki sent for him, arrives on foot, reacts against the opulence of the court, sings grudgingly when asked, and deliberately improvises a

wong that says Sikri is of no use to bhaktas of Hari and that Akbar's face brings sorrow to the viewer. Akbar is angry and says if Kumbhandas wants anything he should sing in praise of Akbar as well. Kumbhandas leaves (pp. 321–4).

After this, Kumbhandas is even more irascible with Man Singh, who appears in the *Varta* as a pious Krishna devotee. He rejects Man Singh's valuable gifts and tells him not to visit again (pp. 325–30).

14 Abbott and Godbole, *Stories of Indian Saints*, part I, p. 33.

15 Ibid., p. 39.

16 Ibid., p. 40.

17 Ibid., p. 41.

18 Ibid., p. 50.

19 Ibid., p. 50.

20 Ibid., p. 51.

21 Ibid., p. 52.

22 Ibid., p. 54.

23 Ibid., part II, pp. 171–5.

24 Ibid., pp. 23–7.

25 Ibid., pp. 345–7.

26 Ibid., pp. 39, 106–7.

27 Ibid., pp. 208–14, 332–4.

28 *Akbarnama* (Calcutta: 1879), vol. II, p. 154, cited in Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1986 [reprint]), vol. I, p. 126.

29 Rizvi, *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 126.

30 *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri* (translated by A. Rogers and Henry Beveridge) reprint, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978, vol. I, p. 2.

31 Akbar's munificence to the Chishtis is well recorded; after Shaikh Sahm's death many of his sons and grandsons continued in royal service and were rewarded for their loyalty with high mansabs. Rizvi, *History of Sufism in India*, (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1983), vol. II, p. 281.

32 Ibid., pp. 264–5.

33 Ibid., p. 281.

34 Ibid., pp. 371–2.

35 Ibid., p. 181.

36 Abdul Qadir Badauni, *Muntakhab ut-Tawarikh*, vol. III, pp. 91–2 in Rizvi, *History of Sufism in India*, vol. II, p. 60.

37 Rizvi, *History of Sufism in India*, vol. II, p. 60.

38 Badauni, *Muntakhab ut-Tawarikh*, vol. III, pp. 35–6; in Rizvi, *History of Sufism in India*, vol. II, p. 61.

39 Ibid., vol. II, p. 63.

40 *Akbarnama*, vol. II, p. 145, in Rizvi, *History of Sufism in India*, vol. I, p. 312.

41 Rizvi, *History of Sufism in India*, vol. I, p. 474.

42 For a discussion of Akbar and the Sikh Gurus within the framework, see the detailed essay from which this has been abridged, Kumkum Sangari, 'Tracing Akbar: Hagiographies, Popular Narrative Traditions and the Subject of Conversion' in N. Chandhoke (ed.), *Mapping Histories* (Delhi: Tulika, 2000) p. 74.

43 *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*, vol. II, pp. 52–3, in Rizvi, *History of Sufism in India*, vol. II, pp. 409–10.

44 Rizvi, *History of Sufism in India*, vol. II, pp. 410–11.

45 Makhan Lal Roychoudhury, *The Din-i-Ilahi: Or, the Religion of Akbar* (Calcutta: 1952), p. 90.

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47 B.N. Goswamy and J.S. Grewal, *Mughals and the Jogs of Jakhhar*, (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1967), pp. 6–7, 25.

48 *Am-i Akbari*, vol. I, pp. 198–9, in Bilgrami, *Religious and Quasi-Religious Departments of the Mughal Period*, pp. 59–60.

49 Rajat M. Bilgrami, *Ibid.*, pp. 61–3.

50 K.M. Ashraf, *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970 [reprint]), p. 257.

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- 56 Daniel Gold, 'Clan and Lineage among the Sants: Seed, Service, Substance', in Schomer and Mcleod, *ibid.*, pp. 305–6, 315; Gold, *The Lord as Guru: Hindi Sants in North Indian Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 195.
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- 58 Described in Elinor W. Gadon, 'Note on the Frontispiece', in Schomer and Mcleod, *The Sants*, pp. 415–18.
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- 60 *Akbarnama*, vol. II, pp. 285, 452–3, *Ain-i Akbari*, vol. I, p. 4, in Bilgrami, *Religious and Quasi-Religious Departments of the Mughal Period*, p. xix.
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- 62 *Ibid.*
- 63 Cited without source in Tara Chand, *Society and State in the Mughal Period* (Lahore: Bakhtiar, 1979 [reprint]), p. 99.
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- 65 Bilgrami, *Religious and Quasi-Religious Departments of the Mughal Period*, p. 63.
- 66 Karkaria, 'Akbar and the Parsees', p. 3.
- 67 This was printed in a book called *Gayane Dilchaman* or 'Pleasant Songs' in 1867. J.J. Modi, 'The Parsees at the Court of Akbar and Dastur Meherji Rana' in Ambasthya, *Contributions on Akbar and the Parsees*, p. 44.
- 68 Modi, *ibid.*, pp. 42–3.
- 69 Jain traders were profiting from Akbar's policies. Surendra Gopal, 'The Jain Community and Akbar', ICHR papers, pp. 6, 8; Shirin Mehta, 'Akbar as Reflected in Contemporary Jain Literature in Gujarat', ICHR papers, pp. 2–3, 7, 10.
- 70 Mohal Lal (ed.), *Bhanuchandra Charitra* (Calcutta: n.p. 1941), pp. 7, 78, 79; Shirin Mehta, 'Akbar as Reflected in Contemporary Jain Literature in Gujarat', ICHR Papers, pp. 3–5, 9.
- 71 Bilgrami, *Religious and Quasi-Religious Departments of the Mughal Period*, p. 65.
- 72 Mehta, 'Akbar in Contemporary Jain Literature', pp. 4–5, 9.
- 73 K.S. Matthew, 'Akbar and the Europeans', ICHR papers, pp. 7–10.
- 74 Roychoudhury, *The Din-i-Ilahi*, p. 115.
- 75 Cited, Matthews, 'Akbar and the Europeans', p. 10.
- 76 Cited, *ibid.*, pp. 11, 24–5.
- 77 Cited, *ibid.*, pp. 12–13.
- 78 *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 17–20.
- 79 Cited, *ibid.*, p. 21.
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- 83 Bilgrami, *Religious and Quasi-Religious Departments of the Mughal Period*, p. 64.
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- 85 Ganguli, p. 196, 247.
- 86 Iqbal Husain, 'Hindu Shrines and Practices as Described by a Central Asian Traveller in the First Half of the 17th Century', in Irfan Habib (ed.), *Medieval India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992) vol. I, p. 145.
- 87 *Ibid.*, p. 147.
- 88 Snell, 'Raskhan the Neophyte', p. 31.
- 89 Varta, cited, *ibid.*, p. 32.
- 90 *North Indian Notes and Queries* (Allahabad: 1891–95) vol. V, p. 197 cited in William Crooke, *Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (Delhi: S. Chand, 1925 [reprint]), p. 151.

- 91 Varta, cited, Snell, 'Raskhan the Neophyte', p. 31.
- 92 Bhavaprakash, cited, Snell, *ibid.*, p. 31.
- 93 The consequences are more evident in another variant of this hagiology. When Damodardas dies, his wife secretly sends his corpse and worldly goods in a boat to Vallabhacharya's temple before announcing the death. Their son, who has become a 'turk' is chagrined by this when he arrives, presumably because he is deprived both of his ritual role and his inheritance. She herself renounces food and drink and dies soon after. CVV (samvat 1978), pp. 30–32.
- 94 Cited, Snell, 'Raskhan the Neophyte' pp. 30, 33–4.
- 95 Ashraf, *Life and Conditions*, p. 110. Dirk H.A. Kolff describes 'temporary conversions' to Islam within soldiering traditions in the fifteen and early sixteenth centuries in *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 57–8, 98–100.
- 96 Richard Eaton, 'The Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid', in Barbara Metcalf (ed.), *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 352–4.
- 97 Many proselytizing Sufi sects succeeded partly because of their vaunted ability to perform miraculous feats. Rizvi, *History of Sufism in India*, vol. II, pp. 427–9.
- 98 D.D. Kosambi on *History and Society* (edited by A.J. Syed) (Bombay: University of Bombay, 1985); Irfan Habib, *Medieval Popular Monotheism and its Humanism: The Historical Setting* (Delhi: Sahmat, 1993), pp. 9–10; Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204–1760* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- 99 Heinrich von Stietencron, 'Religious Identity in Pre-Muslim Hinduism', Seminar on 'Hinduism: Religion or Civilization', Max Mueller Bhavan, Delhi, 1991, p. 81.
- 100 *Ain-i Akbari*, 111, p. 181, in Rizvi, *History of Sufism in India*, vol. II, p. 425.
- 101 Rizvi, *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 425.
- 102 *Muntakhab ul Tawarikh*, vol. II, p. 261, cited in L.A. Khan, 'Akbar's Personality Traits and World Outlook', p. 20; Satish Chandra, 'Akbar and his Rajput Policy: Some Considerations', ICHR papers, p. 12. An eighteenth-century historian also located Akbar's catholicity in zenana politics; he attributed Akbar's abolition of enslavement to the influence of a Brahman woman in his harem.
- 103 Modi, 'The Parsees in the Court of Akbar' in Ambasthya (ed.), *Contributions to Akbar and the Parsees*, pp. 80–81.
- 104 There is enough evidence of the persistence of previous beliefs and practices among converts, especially tribals, to every religion.

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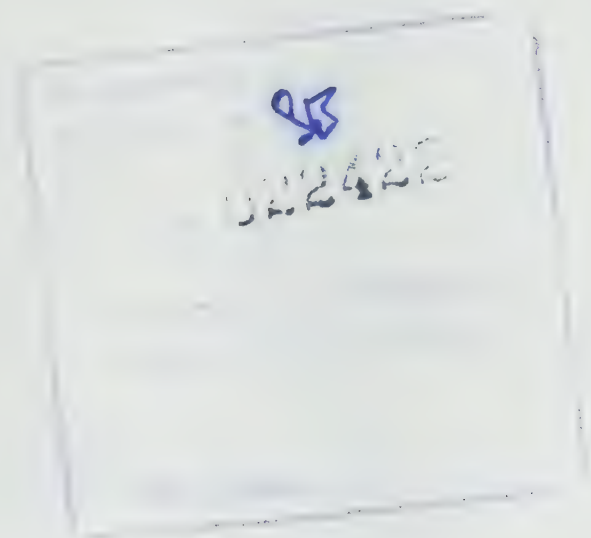
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